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WORDSWORTH AND OTHER
ESSAYS

WORDSWORTH AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

JAMES ROWLEY

FORMERLY PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AND LITERATURE
AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, BRISTOL



J. W. ARROWSMITH LTD.
BRISTOL

First published in 1927

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A. 903877

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*Printed in Great Britain by
J. W. Arrowsmith Ltd., 11 Quay Street, Bristol*

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PREFACE

It has been truly said that "the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts ; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and who rest in unvisited tombs." Of some among this immense number, although their tombs may be unvisited, the remembrance remains for many years distinct and lifelike. The clouds of oblivion gather round them slowly and reluctantly. Dumb forgetfulness seems unwilling to take possession of its prey. Of this familiar experience the writer of the essays contained in this small volume is, to those who knew him, a memorable instance. They meet with repeated evidences that his influence, unconscious though he himself was of its power, still lives and moves within the hearts of his friends. If we try to account for posthumous life such as this, analysis fails us. Personal influence evades detection, and baffles explanation. It is one of those ultimate facts, like heat and cold, which we accept without attempting to separate the fibres of which they are woven. Some characteristics of the writer of the Essays, regarded as a teacher, may, however, be safely identified. His intellectual integrity communicated itself, by an imperceptible contagion, to his listeners. It was impossible, under the spell of such a lecturer, to think lightly of the criminality of careless writing, or an inaccurate presentation of relevant facts ; to remain blind to the danger of hasty judgments, or to be satisfied with

the catchwords of political or religious controversy. Nor was it possible to remain unmoved by the respect with which the lecturer treated his listeners. If a teacher has not the rare gift of being able instinctively to take the common measure of many different minds, and to keep exactly in step with his hearers, it is assuredly better for him to expect too much from them than too little. The writer of these Essays paid his listeners the compliment of supposing that they would be willing to accompany him on the laborious road by which alone knowledge can be reached. He asked them to follow him while he patiently unravelled the tangled skein of fact which forms the material of historical criticism, and then to look with open eyes upon the situation thus disclosed, and the actors who in it played their parts. If humility had allowed him, he might have described the spirit, which found utterance in his teaching, in the words of one of his favourite historians—words which he has marked by one of the unobtrusive but arresting crosses he was in the habit of placing in the margins of the books he read. “I understand,” wrote Stubbs, “the clerical spirit and mind to be that which regards truth and justice above all things, which believes what it believes firmly and intelligently, but with a belief that is fully convinced that truth and justice must in the end confirm the doctrine that it upholds; with a belief that party spirit and highly-coloured pictures of friend and foe are dangerous enemies of truth and justice, and damage in the long run the cause that employs them; that all sides have everything to gain and nothing to lose by full and fair knowledge of the truth. And a clerical view of professional

responsibility I take to be the knowledge that I am working in God's sight and for His purposes." The teacher who takes this high view of his obligations, whose respect for his pupils is such that he will not hide from them the difficulties which beset the conclusion he asks them to reach, who leads them to believe that "all sides have everything to gain and nothing to lose by full and fair knowledge of the truth," is sure of their life-long gratitude. They are conscious of owing to him one of those debts which we are not able to measure because they touch, not what we possess, but what we are. The essays of which this small volume consists will help to "keep green" the memory of a valued teacher in the minds of those to whom he was personally known. They will also, we hope, be welcomed by some who did not know him as illuminating studies of three great English writers, towards two of whom the author felt the interest of a strong admiration, while the attraction of the third arose from an equally marked antagonism.

The Essays are preceded by a brief account of Rowley and his connection with the Bristol University College contributed by Professor G. H. Leonard. They are printed substantially as they were originally written. How far their author would have modified them, had he been acquainted with the literature which has since gathered round these illustrious names, we can only conjecture. The reader of the book may, we feel assured, be safely left to make his own corrections and additions.

JOHN GAMBLE,

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JAMES ROWLEY
and
The University College
Bristol

By G. H. LEONARD

JAMES ROWLEY

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WHEN James Rowley died on November 19th, 1906, Bristol lost a familiar figure and a very striking personality, and the world of scholarship a sound historian and lover of letters. Born in 1834, the son of a farmer in the north of Ireland, he was educated at Dungannon Royal School, under a famous scholar, Dr. Ringwood. He passed on to Trinity College, Dublin, and for some time was in doubt as to his vocation. He thought first of the Bar, and then for some miserable months, inspired by Carlyle's gospel of work, he tried his hand at ship-building in Newcastle. But nature had never intended him for a man of action. His natural place was in the study ; he was to be a man of books, a teacher, an inspirer of men. In 1876 he found his true vocation when, after a short career in Dublin as a successful coach—or "grinder" as the phrase was—and later as "English Master" in Kingstown School, where many distinguished Indian civilians were at one time his pupils, he settled in Bristol as Professor of English History and Literature in the newly-founded University College.

His criticism of Green's *History of the English People* had attracted a great deal of attention in the

previous year. When the *Short History* appeared a few months before, it had been received with an unbroken chorus of approval. There had not been "the faintest public whisper" of dispraise. It had been long awaited by Rowley himself, who believed that at last a History was to be produced which the teacher might use with his class with confidence and satisfaction. But when it appeared he saw — what apparently none of the critics had noticed—a long array of errors, the more serious as it was evident that the work (which was stereotyped and of which already 25,000 copies had been sold) was likely to win for itself a still wider acceptance. In *Fraser's Magazine* (September and December, 1875) the celebrated articles were published which to Green appeared "a long and very violent attack" almost personal in its nature. It was, however, characteristic of the man that he proposed to profit by the trenchant criticism when the opportunity should occur—"this Fraser critic" having, as he acknowledged to Freeman, "pointed out a 'terrible list' of 'careless and discreditable slips.'"

The *Short History*, as it is known to the students of to-day, purged of its original bristling errors, though not well adapted for use in schools as a text-book, is a book that will always be recognised, as Rowley recognised it, even in those days of his first disappointment, as "obviously a creation of fine genius, however fair a mark for criticism in several material respects."¹ Had he known the difficulties under which it had been prepared — the weary illness, the long

¹ *The Student's History of English Literature.*

necessary absences from home and libraries, the writing at times “when nothing seemed worth taking pains about”—his judgment might have been less severely expressed, for personally he was the tenderest and most sympathetic of men. As it was, it seemed to him a simple duty to expose, with an unsparing hand, the weaknesses of the book which even a critic like Gardiner had seemed unable to detect. His conscience in these things was inexorable. He never spared himself any trouble where accuracy and scrupulous fairness were concerned. He knew where his prejudices lay, and he was determined they should never get the better of him. On the other hand, modest as he was, never would he sacrifice his reasoned opinions to any authority, or any name, however popular. It was characteristic of him that, when he had promised to lecture on Bacon, he set himself to read through the whole of his works, in the many volumes of Spedding. “What he sought was evidence”—I am quoting Irwin here—“and as he did not find it, he was no more ready than before to acquit Bacon on the strength of Spedding’s charge to the jury.” We have the very volumes still in the University Library—given by friends, in his memory, with many other greatly-valued books from his collection—poor as he was he could never resist a fine edition. Here all down the margin are his minute crosses, characteristically neat (as in his own copy of the *Short History*, which we also possess), with comments in his small, cramped hand, which show the patience of his long and unwearied examination.

Rowley came to Bristol while the historical world was still discussing the letters written by the "obscure teacher" in *Fraser's Magazine*. It was, I understand, the reputation he had so recently made that brought him to the city.

It was soon clear that a profound scholar had settled in our midst. Sidney Irwin, of Clifton College, told me once that when Warde Fowler used to visit him in Bristol he thought Rowley "the most substantial person he met here." There was indeed a rare solidity about his learning which no one could miss. If knowledge is of two kinds—the knowledge of the head and the knowledge of the shelves, Rowley's knowledge was patently not a knowledge of the note-book and the library. It has been said that it "seemed always a part of himself, not as if he acquired it, but as if he had known everything always." He never seemed to make a mistake. His accuracy in dealing even with the smaller details of history was amazing. He would almost apologise for knowing so much "It is my trade," he said, "to keep these things right."

As a writer he has left little behind him, but his contributions to the *Dictionary of History* and to Bishop (then the Rev.) Mandell Creighton's "Epoch" series—the first of the modern series of popular History text-books, which served more than a generation of students—were recognised as models of sound historical writing; and his (unpublished) lectures, especially perhaps his lectures on English Literature, with their fine criticism, sober enthusiasm, and fastidious taste, were for thirty years the delight

and inspiration of students now scattered over all the world.

I remember how I first came, as a student, raw, with tastes all unformed, to the evening classes at the College and was drawn under the magic of his spell. As he passed from one mighty poet to another—poets, mere names until he made them live—I felt, as others felt, like a watcher of the skies while he swept new planets into my ken. He made us see the stars and feel their beauty. I remember how that spring all the natural world seemed new: the crocuses opening to the warm March sun—if these personal memories may be forgiven here—the budding trees, the tender blue of our mild western sky. He had given me, as he gave others, once and for all, the love of poetry, eyes and ears, a sense

“Of humble cares and delicate fears,
And love, and thought, and joy.”

His students went away from his lectures feeling, as Canon Gamble said in his sermon (preached on the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the old University College), “that he opened up to them sources of joy, springs of life, to which they would still have access, no matter what their future lot might be, whether they became rich or poor, solitary or surrounded by friends. They might question some of his judgments, or think that his strong ethical interests, his hatred of self-love and self-seeking, his contempt for popular watchwords made him sometimes blind to the artistic merits of some brilliant offenders against

the law of righteousness. But even when they did thus hesitate to follow, they were deeply affected by seeing a man moved to enthusiastic admiration, or it may be to cordial hatred of some writer or actor in the pageant of history who had been centuries in his grave."

Very many of his students have written to me recently to say they have the note-books still in which they carried away what they could of his lectures. I have mine. The sight of them now, with their shabby, shiny covers and pink edges, calls back some of the happiest hours of my life. I hear again the stately lines he loved to repeat in the familiar voice—not in itself a beautiful voice, for he never lost his strong north-Irish accent—but a voice gaining in richness and in dignity as he read some passage to us which moved him with its power and beauty.

He loved best to speak to his class from what he liked to call "the humble obscurity" of his chair. He was not quite at his ease in addressing an unfamiliar audience. Yet, on the rare occasions when he "made a speech," men listened, partly because they quickly realised that, in his characteristically conscientious fashion, he had done those whom he addressed the compliment of making careful preparation. These efforts were always memorable. What he said had obviously been thought out; argument followed argument, the allusions were many and apt, the quotations felicitous, the points pressed home with skill and force. He was not an orator; perhaps like his fellow-countryman Burke—one of the men who most deeply influenced his life—he made speeches

which would have seemed at their best if we could have read them at our leisure. Certainly one could not hear him speak, when his interest was strongly engaged, without wishing to have what he said in print.

I do not think that he wrote in the first instance with ease. He himself was always looking forward to putting what he had to say into "final form." He was not easily satisfied. But glancing now at his lectures, written for the class-room, and following the work as it shaped itself under his hand, we can see how the first rugged sentences were gradually built up, pruned, and enriched, until they ran at last with something of the strength and dignity—and the exactness—at which he aimed. Sometimes, indeed, a phrase, decent and just to begin with, grew, as his thought and judgment played upon it, into a mighty and memorable line. Those who heard these packed and vigorous paragraphs read but once, or listened to a great sentence, struggling at the same time to get but a poor half of it down in black and white, could hardly realise the opulence of the thought that he would press into a single line.

It is pleasant to know that though he worked hard at the College—and sometimes, no doubt, the daily round must have been wearisome to him—he himself used to speak of the hours passed in what he called the "unlovely room" (now No. 16) as some of the happiest times of his life. To many of us who knew him there he must always be the "master." One of his students, of the early Irish period of his life, wrote

the other day saying that he could never think of him except as "Mr." Rowley. Many of us felt like that, but he drew out to himself a strength of personal devotion—of affection—which in its manifestation always seemed to give him a new surprise. He could not understand how it was that men said he deeply influenced their lives. "I only tried," he said, "to teach them something."

His life, in the ordinary sense, was uneventful. It was a life, however, of which friendships formed a very large part. Many of those, perhaps, who only heard him lecture never guessed how rich and deep his nature was, though often, in class, he revealed himself more clearly than he knew. He was not one, however, to wear his heart upon his sleeve, and casual observers could scarcely have guessed in how large a measure he possessed that very beautiful and rare thing which we call sentiment. No small part of his life was made up of little acts, not altogether unremembered, of kindness and of love. He was "pious" in the old sense of the word. He remembered what was due to his country, his kin, his friends, and those whom he recognised as bound to him by any tie. Irwin touched once on that "other piety of his—piety in its ordinary sense—of which no one dared to speak in his reticent and reverent presence." No true picture of the man can be drawn which could leave quite unsuggested that inner life of which he rarely spoke, but no one could be near him long without seeing that it was there.

He was deeply attached to the Church of England.

Its restrained and stately services suited well his own reserved temperament. He used to say that his spirit would haunt the woods he loved; and those who believe in haunted churches will like to think that his spirit lingers in the little church, where he loved to be, among the birch-trees and the firs. And having said so much perhaps it would not be right to say more; it will be enough if I borrow Irwin's words again and say that the life, of which I have here written so briefly and so incompletely, obeyed, clearly and consciously, the old precept of the saint: *Cum humilitate et patientia expecta cœlestem visitationem.*

G. H. L.

WORDSWORTH

Four Lectures by James Rowley

Wordsworth¹

I.

THERE is a curious and finished felicity in the history of Wordsworth, which gives a distinction to the man, his life and his work, not observable, perhaps, in the career of any other English poet. Wordsworth might be pronounced a realised ideal. The internal and external conditions of life in his case look as if they were in a predetermined harmony; as if they had conspired together from the outset to turn out a poet of a peculiar type in as perfect a shape as was needed. Natural disposition and inborn tendencies—the thing that is called accident—and circumstances—the thing that is called environment—both the constant and the changing, the unvarying and the varying—were in cordial alliance, were exactly fitted to each other, and worked together to do for Wordsworth what the combination of inborn power with rigid, carefully-schemed and carefully-pursued intellectual and moral training and discipline did for Milton—to make the human stuff submitted to them, not only the very thing that it most wanted to be, but also the very best

¹ The Wordsworth Lectures were written in 1889. The footnotes appearing in the following pages are Professor Rowley's own.

thing it could be, and one of the very best things in its kind that have ever been. If for once it may be allowable to give a particular application to his own lines from *The Recluse*—

“ How exquisitely the individual mind
 . . . to the external world
Is fitted :—and how exquisitely too,
Theme this but little heard of among men,
The external world is fitted to the mind ; ”

with safety surely we may apply them to Wordsworth ; the fitness of *his* external world to *his* individual mind well-nigh through his whole life is indeed exquisite.

It were not, perhaps, too curious either to speculate on the possible significance of his parentage. His father, John Wordsworth, attorney-at-law and agent to the great Lowther estates, was the son of a Yorkshireman who had migrated to Cockermouth in Cumberland, his mother, Anne Cookson, the daughter of a Penrith mercer. Some might regard this conjunction as forecasting that union of austerity, of stern and occasionally ungenial virtue, with a more winning element of character that was noted in him—the undoubted mixture of Yorkshire grit, as men name the thing, with softer and more human ingredients in his composition. Wordsworth was certainly never a very genial or sociable man, though not conspicuously the opposite either. But we have his own testimony to show that he was a stubborn, not easily manageable lad in his early years, that he was the only one of her children regarding whose future his mother—early lost to him—felt a strong

anxiety ; there are indications in his youth, and a strain traceable throughout his whole life, which suggest to some minds the suspicion that he might under different circumstances have developed into a character like his own Peter Bell, had not restraining influences interposed.

His whole earlier life from the first, when contemplated in connexion with the end eventually attained, and perhaps proposed, looks like a succession of strokes of good fortune : his very mishaps, sorrows, wrongs, disappointments are all, or nearly all, construable into forces that tended to the development of his special destiny ; this their several sequels seem to prove. He cannot be said, certainly, to have had his mind moulded and his character formed to any appreciable extent by the one influence to which a prevalent—perhaps not quite justifiable—sentiment assigns a foremost place in such work, for his mother died when he was eight years old.¹ And his father followed his mother five years later, too soon also to sensibly affect his son's settled disposition.

Neither of these bereavements, however, irreparable as both must have appeared to the boy and his relatives when they befell him, can be seen to have been any loss to Wordsworth the poet ; certainly in no large sense of the word did his education suffer by them. In this respect Wordsworth was a veritable favourite of Heaven, if ever poet was ; Milton in the conditions of his boyhood and plastic time generally did not enjoy greater advantages, or benefit more by them, than

¹ Yet see his own words in *The Prelude* v. 258.

Wordsworth did in his ; and the later case is all the more striking than the earlier that it was in no sense—indeed *could* not have been—the outcome of human forecast. The circumstances that fell to Wordsworth's lot when a boy were the exact ones that were best adapted to his natural gifts, best calculated to draw them out and foster them. From the first the mystic powers may be conceived to have watched over the boy with special vigilance, and to have nourished a special hope regarding him, bringing him, and taking care to keep him, under the influences that a temperament like his needed for the training of his peculiar genius. He early became a "dedicated spirit," a child offered by Mother Nature to the service of the Muse, "that punctual service high" which alone satisfies her single-hearted votaries. We should perhaps do little violence to truth if we adapted to him that passage of his own composition which tells of the maid that grew in sun and shower with Nature as her sole teacher—by some the poem is named "The Education of Nature":—

" And Nature said

* * * * *

This ' boy ' I to myself will take
 ' He ' shall be mine and I will make
 A ' poet ' of my own."

The poet himself was conscious of this exceeding felicity that was vouchsafed him. Several portions, as well as the whole spirit of *The Prelude*, prove this :—

“ Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear,
Much favoured in my birth-place, and no less
In that beloved vale to which ere long
We were transplanted . . . ”

And again :—

“ Ye presences of Nature in the sky
And on the earth ! Ye visions of the hills !
And souls of lonely places ! can I think
A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed
Such ministry ? ”

There are also many others. Thus the lad grew into a complete man according to Nature's design and his own desire ; his life and disposition were consistent throughout ; and his own aspirations were gratified to the letter.

These natural influences were lavished upon him as child and boy : as child during the first eight years of his life, when the castle and river of Cockermouth and scenery round shaped and enriched his plastic and receptive mind ; as boy during the nine following years, passed mainly at Hawkshead as a member of Dame Tyson's household and a scholar at the village school. In the first his most effective tutors were natural influences and his sister Dorothy ; in the second were added a still larger measure of the natural influences, and boyish friendships in sufficient measure. What he owed to his sole sister, who was little more than a year younger than himself, his own acknowledgment in *The Sparrow's Nest* testifies :—

“ She gave me eyes, she gave me ears ;
And humble cares and delicate fears ;
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears,
And love and thought and joy.”¹

But his nine years of little-controlled submission to Nature's discipline at Hawkshead were the specially fruitful time. His life and pursuits there were exactly suited, we might almost say, designed, to nurse a naturally rustic-minded boy, with high but as yet unsuspected endowments, into the modern high-priest of Nature and poet of the domestic affections. His schoolmaster, William Taylor, Anne Tyson, and several school companions were long and tenderly remembered in later life ; the name of the first will always be associated, though never even substantially identified, with the Matthew of three exquisite lyrics ; and tributes to the others, of great though less power, are found among his works. How far there ever was a fleshly Matthew may be a question ; these poems will still embody as original, delicate and delightful a creation as ever imagination shaped.² Of his education at Hawkshead it is a safe thing to say, that his studies in books of men's making were not inconsiderable, but moderate, as compared with those in books of Nature's making. It does not appear that he was externally in any way distinguished from his fellows in boyhood ; no prophetic intimations of coming distinction, no peculiar promise of power, is recorded.

¹ See also *To a Butterfly*.

² See also *Address to the Scholars of the Village School of —*.

Yet his native faculty, despite his comparative indifference to regular studies, did not escape the eye of his sister Dorothy, with whom he spent most of his holidays at an aunt's house at Penrith. Writing to a friend, when still a mere growing girl, Dorothy picked out William and Christopher as the clever ones of her four brothers; and it says much for her insight that Christopher also came to much distinction in the event, being still honourably known in the academic world.

William's first compositions in verse were but slightly superior to their intention and expectation—and they were mere tasks imposed by the rules of the school. Among the many and manifold incidents or achievements of his school life recorded in verse by himself, three seem worthy of special note, (1) the adventure narrated in the first book of *The Prelude* that he took for the first revelation of a conscience within him,¹ (2) the incident described in *Nutting*, and (3) the significance of his first characteristic scrap of verse. To the second might be given a second symbolic construction very far from its author's mind when he wrote it; its catastrophe and moral are capable of a wider, perhaps sadder application. In it we may read a symbol of the entire Lake District and its fate as the result of the poet's own action; this pleasant region too, "deformed and sullied," may be imaged as having given "up its quiet being," as a consequence of its inconsiderate admirers having torn the veil from

¹ Significant too that an effect of external nature was the agent in this case.—*The Prelude* i. l. 357.

its beauty. The third also reads like an unconscious prophecy, though of the writer's future only, and of an altogether pleasant fact in that future. It moreover suggests one more link between the great personalities of Milton and Wordsworth, in the seemingly predestinated consistency of the spiritual lives of both.

Of the Cambridge chapter in his history—some four years long (1787-1791)—the most remarkable, perhaps the only relevant, fact is the fruitful way in which he spent his vacations. It was not the time that he passed, but the time that he did not pass, at Cambridge which supplied the university culture, the higher education, to this singular spirit. As Esthwaite Lake and the hills and vales round Hawkshead were the school, so his own Lakeland, Derbyshire, Wales, France, the Alps, where he wandered in successive vacations, were the University in which this poet of Nature's own moulding really received the one thing needful to enable him to give the world the fruition of his powers. Cambridge may have saved him from the damaging, perhaps fatal, effects of an apprenticeship to an uncongenial employment—and there would seem to have been some risk of such a thing—and brought him leisure to read an English poet or two, such as Spencer and Chaucer, facts duly recorded in *The Prelude*; but it is of little positive account in the poet's development; negative or insignificant results can alone be traced to it. How slight was the impression that his University made upon him is evidenced by a single fact, that no poem of his great time contains a single reference or allusion to Cambridge; not an

experience or object there or in the neighbourhood was sufficiently kindling to win high poetical recognition from him, when the poetical mood was highest. Yet Wordsworth is credited with one intellectual bent which one would have expected to give him an interest in Cambridge ; he had a reverence for and admiration of the higher mathematics, linking “poetry and geometric truth” together, and finding in both a “high privilege of lasting life.” This regard for that austere study, however, remained content with this expression ; it does not seem to have ever given any practical proof of its existence. But it is worth remarking here, if only as suggesting, by the contrast it presents to the notorious aversion of Gray and Ruskin to the same study, how varied is the stuff that poetical genius is made of. Nor is anyone, in my opinion, at liberty to argue from Wordsworth’s case the uselessness to genius of a university training—no more than he is justified in arguing from the same case that the education of Nature is best for all ; for Wordsworth was a special creation whose special destiny demanded a special education ; and it is to the credit of Cambridge that she did nothing to thwart Nature’s purpose in this. She did not force on the still tender, still unripe, genius of this singular student the learning, the book-knowledge, that might have brought a nipping frost on its early bloom ; with all deference to Mr. Arnold’s judgement, it is just as well that no violence be done to the idiosyncracies of gifted natures ; and that Wordsworth was no great lover of books is well known, though there are those who maintain that his

indifference to them has been exaggerated. *His* books were the running brooks, and these are not plentiful in the neighbourhood of Cambridge.

The incidents of his Cambridge years that most affected his future were his renewal of intimate relations with his sister, his renewal of friendship with the phantom of delight that had been his schoolfellow when a child and was to be, eleven years hence, his wife, and his first continental tour, of which the adventure at the Grande Chartreuse and the passage of the Simplon were the experiences that impressed him most. All these belong to the third year of his Cambridge career ; and all have their due meed of immortality bestowed on them in *The Prelude*. Nor would it be easy to over-rate the importance of the first and last. The debt of his genius to his sister is incalculable ; she it was that made his gains from his education productive ; but for her all that Nature had done for him might have been wasted labour ; to her too it is largely due that throughout his career he was "true to the kindred points of Heaven and home." It was not the least among Wordsworth's felicities that this gracious and stimulating presence, this blessing of his later years, entered his life in earnest just at the stage in his development when such an influence was most needed, when the danger of a diversion of his powers into alien and unproductive fields was greatest. And that the poet had himself the strongest feeling of this obligation, and rejoiced in its acknowledgement three passages in his poetry will alone suffice to prove---that in the Tintern Abbey

poem, that in the eleventh, and that in the fourteenth book of *The Prelude*. And to the passage of the Simplon one is tempted to ascribe the awakening of the Higher Imagination in Wordsworth, as well as the first stirring within him of those exalted moods which so often find expression in the extraordinary elevation of some of his noblest verse in his great time. Not that his spirit at once caught such an exaltation, but Poetry, according to his own principle, "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity"; and the impressions that journey made were doubtless only deepened, the images it left upon the memory doubtless only gathered power, for having been stored up for years. In any case the sublimity of the expression of these emotions, recollected in tranquillity across nine years, as found in the sixth book of *The Prelude*, has seldom, if ever, been surpassed.

A time of doubt and uncertainty¹—also four years long (1791-1795)—followed the completion of his Cambridge career. These years were marked by a dubitation and anxiety, a wavering and irresolution, a fear and hesitation regarding the future, little characteristic of the Wordsworth of the future, being found in no other part of his life. Several fruitless ideas and projects laid hold of his purpose in succession—at one time indeed he seemed fully resolved to take Holy Orders. Wanderings to and fro, a general restlessness, betrayed the commotion within. The chief

¹ A time of grave peril also, in which the promise of his earlier days might have been wrecked utterly, had it not been for the firm hold that Nature had got.

event for him during this time—and a very retarding one it must have been—was his long stay in France, first at Orleans and Blois, then in Paris, just at the stage of the Revolutionary fever when it was entering on its delirium of massacre and general horrors, known as the Terror. This surely was not a fair seed, or germinating, time; and if prolonged, might have blighted the promise that was already revealing itself. The emotions of this experience, abundant, varied and deep as they assuredly were, recollected in the tranquillity of ten years later, may be read in the ninth and tenth books of *The Prelude*, and seem to me to deserve more attention than they generally get. It is well known that he was at this time a pronounced partisan of the French movement, an ardent Revolutionist; and the scenes he witnessed in Paris as yet failed to shake his sympathies. This period is singular in his life as one of brooding unhappiness and depression of spirits. It was not lasting, however; he came home, and his sister's influence again cheered and steadied him, materially aiding Nature in keeping him true to his destiny. Then the death of a young friend whom he had tended in his last illness brought within reach the object that Dorothy desired. For this friend, Raisley Calvert, moved by gratitude and a firm belief in the poet's destiny, bequeathed him some £900,—sufficient, in alliance with their frugal habits, to support brother and sister for several years and enable Wordsworth to follow the bent of his genius. This, too, the ever mindful Wordsworth places on grateful record; the thirty-sixth of the *Miscellaneous Sonnets*, and a

passage in the last book of *The Prelude*, are not unexpressive tributes to Calvert's memory and service. He had already made his first poetical ventures, publishing in 1793 *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* ; now he came to the final resolution to which his sister was the chief force in waking him, of making poetry the great and exclusive business of his life.

Of Wordsworth's *Descriptive Sketches* Coleridge, then at Cambridge, had a high, perhaps an extravagant opinion. "Seldom, if ever," he wrote, "was the emergence of an original poetic genius above the literary horizon more evidently announced." Such these verses seemed to the eye of sympathetic genius ; a form of later criticism has been able to see in them only a pair of characterless compositions in the manner of Pope or Erasmus Darwin ; a juster estimate than either might discern in them things new and old, hear in them echoes of the past and promises of the future, read in them a struggle between the conventional form and manner of a practically extinct school and a native original force struggling to assert itself.

The conflict, however, was soon over ; Wordsworth's matchless felicity, always associated with poetical influences, with poetry and incentives to poetry, recovered its old ascendancy, and was never long from his side during the half century of life that still remained to him. Four and a half years, however, had yet to pass before he fixed his abode in the lovely region that his genius has consecrated and yet been the innocent occasion of desecrating. Two of these years he and his sister passed at Racedown in Dorsetshire,

one at Alfoxton, in the Quantocks, and one and a half partly in Germany and partly in seemingly aimless roving in England. The work he did at Racedown, while revealing the sense that he had hit upon his appointed task in life, also reveals that he had not yet hit upon the exact form of that work for which he had been sent into the world ; the old conventional world, the old poetical beliefs, still hung about him. His chief though not his sole employment at Racedown was the translating of the Roman satirist Juvenal. In this we may have a hint of what Wordsworth might have been had he been born earlier and been thus brought up in a different spiritual atmosphere, a great satirist. For the censorious spirit was strong in him ; he had inborn impulses towards satire ; here and there in his poetry we are given specimens of the biting things he had it in him to say ; such outbursts are frequent in *The Prelude* ; in the Cambridge part in particular the true satirical temper manifests itself, yet ever with the corrective of his acrimony near at hand ; and in that entirely characteristic poem *A Poet's Epitaph* the keen, almost merciless, incisiveness of the satirist that opens the composition is redeemed only by the marvellous verses, so steeped in natural feeling, that follow, again disclosing the corrective, the counteracting force, of his otherwise uncontrollable propensity. Even as late as 1806 he felt the tendency to satire still a living force within him, and he was not quite sure that he would not yet indulge the humour. " I have long since come to a fixed resolution," he wrote to Sir George Beaumont, " to steer clear of personal

satire ; in fact, I never will have anything to do with it as far as concerns the private vices of individuals on any account. With respect to public delinquents or offenders, I will not say the same." He was in these years also hunting counter in another direction : so far as I have noticed, none of our Wordsworthians claim for their hero any effective share of the dramatic faculty, yet the first year of his life at Racedown was largely devoted to the composition of a tragedy, *The Borderers* (1795-1796), which not long afterwards he made a vain effort to get produced on the stage, but did not publish till 1842. Now the actual and possible loss to Wordsworth and us by this temporary surrender of himself to a real but perverse and unseasonable instinct and a false conception of his powers, may be estimated by the fact that for three years—and three most important years too, those between his twenty-fifth and twenty-eighth birthday—he did not produce a single copy of Wordsworthian verses, a single composition that had his special race in it, except *The Reverie of Poor Susan*.

Indeed, this special race in him, so inseparable from the thought of him now, was slow to declare itself and inactive in its working for a good space after it had declared itself. In three compositions only was its power manifested before the poet's twenty-ninth year, the *Remembrance of Collins* (1789), the *Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree* (1795), and this *Reverie of Poor Susan* (1797) ; yet this was an age that Keats' whole life fell short of by more than three years, and Shelley's only exceeded by less than two. It might be guessed

that a second human influence besides his sister Dorothy's was needed to open the kindly vein of this shy genius ; in any case, in 1797 this second human influence appeared ; and the kindly vein soon after began to flow to some purpose. In the June of this year Coleridge came to Racedown ; and the memorable intimacy of the two poets was formed. How they were first brought together is not exactly known ; nor even which was the first to seek out the other ; but the evidence tends to show that Wordsworth had come to Bristol in 1795 specially to see Coleridge, and that their first meeting had taken place either in Mr. Pinney's House or at 25 (now 51) College Street—of which meeting, however, nothing has been recorded. One thing seems certain, that the visit of the younger genius to Racedown in 1797 was the beginning of those close relations to which the elder is thought to have owed so much ; the time when—as the elder himself eight years afterwards wrote, directly addressing Coleridge—

“ Thy kindred influence to my heart of hearts,
Did also find its way.”

To be pre-eminently an influence would seem to have been Coleridge's appointed place in the intellectual and spiritual movement of the century ; if this is so, Wordsworth was his first signal conquest. Of this indeed there can be no question—that Coleridge's entrance into Wordsworth's life and Wordsworth's entrance upon his own great time took place almost simultaneously. Their souls soon got knit together

in the tenderest intellectual brotherhood of which Dorothy also was a cherished part ; the admiration of all three for one another soon became unbounded. In a few days Coleridge could write to Cottle, " I speak with heartfelt sincerity, and I think unblinded judgment, when I tell you that I feel a little man by his side." And of Miss Wordsworth he wrote later on, " She is a woman indeed, in mind I mean, and in heart ; for her person is such that if you expected to see a pretty woman, you would think her ordinary ; if you expected to see an ordinary woman, you would think her pretty ; but her manners are simple, ardent, impressive. . . . Her information various ; her eye watchful in minutest observation of Nature ; and her taste a perfect electrometer." For more than a year the three were seemingly all in all to one another ; their work, their thoughts, their deepest feelings — all that belongs to the innermost sanctuary of the soul—were unreservedly shared, were the common property of the three. To describe the nature and measure and trace the leading effects of this companionship upon Wordsworth would need more time than our limits will allow ; but its immediate consequences to his character are indicated in that passage of *The Prelude* from which I last quoted ; and those who are aware of the marvellous fecundity of ideas and speculations that then distinguished Coleridge would get little additional profitable knowledge from details. Briefly expressed, the matter is something like this : as his sister gave him " eyes and ears," companionship of the most sensitive sympathy, kept him true to his

destiny, toned down his austerity, chased away his gloom, shielded his spirit from every noxious influence, and convinced him that he was a poet, Coleridge supplied the germinative heat that made his powers productive, kindled by the mere contact of a kindred spirit the vivifying energy that had been practically asleep hitherto, taught him the true province of his genius, turned his distrust of himself into confidence, and by the stimulus to the will and quickening and inspiriting of the imagination that his multiform speculations and rich and subtle discourse engendered, soon enabled Wordsworth to give actual demonstration of the fact that had hitherto been but a faith, a longing, with Dorothy and himself. It may almost certainly be taken to have been a result of his association with Coleridge—indirect if not direct—that Wordsworth found out where his strength lay, which of his gifts was the peculiar and priceless one, was the gift that alone could place him among the immortals.

It is to Coleridge too that we, born or adopted children of Bristol, owe the share we have in Wordsworth. An immediate consequence of the newly-formed friendship was the migration of brother and sister from Racedown to Nether Stowey, where Coleridge was then living, and thence in a very short time to the spacious and splendidly furnished mansion of Alfoxton or Alfoxden in the Quantocks, the ancestral seat of the St. Albyns, which happened just then to be attainable at a ridiculously disproportionate rent (£23 a year), because its owner was still a minor. Here Wordsworth spent eleven happy and fruitful months (July, 1797–June

1798), in almost constant intercourse with Coleridge, conversing, composing, planning, taking in the gracious influences of the country round at every pore—living to the eye of the ignorant onlooker an idle, aimless, useless—indeed somewhat mysterious and suspicious—life, yet a life rich in quiet spiritual energy, and amply justified by the fruits it bore and soon gave to the world.

Short as was Wordsworth's stay at Alfoxden, and questionable as his roving, solitary, exclusive habits seemed to his neighbours, it was yet long enough and productive enough to add a new charm to the Quantocks, to bestow on them a most appropriate spiritual grace by merely associating their name with half a dozen compositions of the finest and rarest temper. Of this passage of his life there is no lack of historic record ; and all that is recorded is of the highest interest. Its outer history has but three striking incidents : (1) the short walking tour with Dorothy and Coleridge in November, 1797, that suggested to the two young men the idea of writing a joint poem whose publication in *The Monthly Magazine* might cover the expenses they must incur, which soon showed itself impossible of realisation but gave birth to *The Ancient Mariner* and the scheme of publishing a joint volume, to be called *Lyrical Ballads* ; (2) Wordsworth's journey to London in December with his sister in the vain hope of getting his tragedy of *The Borderers* brought out on the stage, for Coleridge had been generous of his praise in his criticism of *The Borderers* ; and (3) the extraordinary notion that got abroad among the folk in those parts, "some gentle and all simple"—to apply

to them an expression of Swift's—that Wordsworth was a dark conspirator and plotter against the State, whose unexplained and inexplicable appearance among them, want of visible occupation and outwardly unintelligible wanderings could only mean some deep design against the established order carried on in concert with revolutionists and incendiaries elsewhere. This notion is usually traced to Coleridge's having one day brought John Thelwall to Alfoxden—Thelwall the enemy of kings and stormy revolutionist, who had been tried for treason two years before. On this last topic much has been said and written—more, I suspect, than there is sufficient warrant for—and some amusement has been distilled out of it. It undoubtedly had the effect of cutting short Wordsworth's stay in the Quantocks, for Mrs. St. Albyn, the minor's mother, heard the evil things that were circulating regarding her son's tenant, and unmoved by Mr. Thomas Poole's earnest assurance that Wordsworth was a true man and no traitor, directed the agent not to renew the agreement with him at the end of the year.

Now it is a fact that may perhaps have a bearing on the matter, as helping to account for the amazing delusion, though it has never, I believe, been remarked in this connexion by anyone else—that not only was the year of the arrival of the mysterious strangers, 1797, the great historical year of England's extremist peril from the Revolution, of huge schemes for her destruction in foreign ports and the sailings of expeditions to execute them, and of appalling

mutinies in her own fleets ; but also, a few months before Wordsworth came to the coast of Somerset, a revolutionary force, the Black Legion, the sweepings of French prisons, had sailed into the Bristol Channel, on the benevolent mission of burning Bristol, and had actually destroyed some ships off the coast of Somerset, at Ilfracombe.

It is doubtful, too, whether the real character of Wordsworth's life in these ever memorable thirteen months would not bring him, if he were living now, into as grave disfavour with the earnest class that is so clamorous for work and makes earnest toil their standard of excellence. In a subsequent poem Wordsworth declares that, "both Man and Boy," he was "an idler in the land," and two or three of his special successes at Alfoxden not only tell the same sad tale of joyous inertia, but also seek—of course, impotently—to vindicate its wisdom. The delicious poison—to none so delicious as to hard workers—is contained in *Expostulation and Reply*, *The Tables Turned*, and *To My Sister*, to which if *Lines written in Early Spring* be added—in those four poems is heard the sweetest of notes to jaded ears, the song of the siren of the Quantocks. In one of them at any rate we are given the assurance that the end of Nature's dealings with Wordsworth had at last been reached—

"To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran."

This passage shows that the understanding between Nature and her favourite child was now perfect.

Among the dozen or so other pieces produced at Alfoxden the only entirely worthy associates of the just mentioned four are *We are Seven* and *Simon Lee*, though in one or two others the true Wordsworthian can hear some of his master's sweetest tones, will not even miss these perhaps in *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*, and *The Idiot Boy*, whose publication brought so much ridicule on their author, not, I fear, altogether undeserved. *We are Seven* is another expression of "emotion recollected in tranquillity," though of a softer emotion than most of the others, the simple incident that is here so simply and yet winningly told having befallen the poet at Goodrich Castle five years before. In *Simon Lee* a hint is given of the liberties that poets often take—and really ought not to be blamed for taking—with facts; "the sweet shire of Cardigan" ought to be the perhaps sweeter shire of Somerset. For old Simon Lee, who was a real person, was the emeritus huntsman of the St. Albyn family. I am afraid too that Alfoxden had to yield up its just honours to the "Hall of Ivor," because it wouldn't, while the latter would, rhyme with "sole survivor." But neither of these things at all matters—in a poem, and our tongue is thrifty in her rhymes and a poet's ear is naturally sensitive to sounds. Four years later, when settled at Grasmere, Wordsworth wrote those famous stanzas in his copy of the *Castle of Indolence*, concerning which there has been so much difference of opinion and speculation, but regarding which my belief has long been fixed—that the new denizen which these stanzas place

in the Castle was himself, his companion, Coleridge. To every difficulty that has been raised against these identifications one answer is sufficient, the poem is a poem. This conclusion accepted, another cannot, I am sure, be resisted, that, though written at Grasmere, and true of Grasmere, the first four stanzas are a not unduly overcharged picture of the poet's habit of life among the Quantocks also, where his movements and broodings were a wonder and a disquiet to rustic and squire. If we would see our poet in the Quantocks, in his familiar presentment there, we should read these four stanzas.

In June, 1798, he and his sister left Alfoxden and came to Bristol, walking the whole way, as their wont in such circumstances then was. After passing a week with Joseph Cottle, they went on a ramble along the banks of the Wye. This ramble lasted for only four or five days, but one of these sufficed to give it a glory transcending that of every other ramble or tour made by poet. The ramblers took Tintern Abbey both going and returning ; and as they were leaving Tintern for the last time to come to Bristol, the poet's mood became unusually favourable for the production of exalted verse—with the result—unexampled, I suspect, in the history of poetry—that to the poem begun at starting the last line was added just as the poet was entering Bristol in the evening. And this poem was the ever-memorable Tintern Abbey inspiration, of a strength, intensity, depth and volume that were never again to find a complete parallel in its author's compositions. This incident in her history must surely

be taken to be Bristol's chief distinction in her not undistinguished connexion with letters. The poem must also surely be taken as a conclusive proof that the poet was right in making his sojourn among the Quantocks the termination of his long apprenticeship, for his *Prelude*, which had yet to be composed, closes with that sojourn. No question now that his destiny and work on earth had been settled beyond all need or even possibility of change. The unfathomable depth of feeling, in union with tranquil strength, of the Tintern Abbey lines indicates that the poet's spirit had reached the shining table-lands that were to be its soul's dwelling-place and pleasant region of labour for life. The deepening and solemnising of his feelings since his visit to the same place five years before, expressed in the course of the poem, are also eminently worthy of remark. "His dizzy raptures" are now ended; the sounding cataract no longer "haunts him like a passion." Yet he is still

"well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of 'his' purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of 'his' heart, the soul
Of all 'his' moral being."

This poem is Wordsworth's glad confession of faith as a poet; it is a protestation and proclamation to all that care to hear, of his absolute trust in Nature and unreserved surrender of himself to her service. It is also a kind of self-consecration to his high office, in the presences that he loved so well, Nature's and his sister's. And this is all the more wonderful for

the external conditions, those incident to a passage from Tintern to Bristol in a small vessel. Addison had plumed himself on having wooed the Muse on the top of Mont Cenis, in the passage of which he wrote his Rhyming Epistle to Lord Halifax ; but the region of Mont Cenis with all its snows is the very fount of inspiration compared with the deck of a Bristol lugger of the eighteenth century.

The publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*, that epoch-making book in the estimation of some, was Wordsworth's real business in Bristol at this time, and the occasion of his only stay of any length in our city. He remained for about six weeks, superintending the passing of his own and Coleridge's poems through the press ; and then, towards the end of August, received the £30, the promised price of his contributions to the volume, from the generous Cottle, and started with his sister in search of new pleasures and new founts of inspiration. Soon after their departure, in the autumn of 1798, the modest volume that has had such a world of talk about it since, stole from the Press. Its first poem was *The Ancient Mariner*, its last the *Lines written above Tintern Abbey*. Of the others, twenty-one in number, all but three were Wordsworth's.

This joint production of Coleridge and Wordsworth is at the same time an amendment and an extension of their original tour-paying project ; having soon learnt that they could not write a poem in partnership, they arranged to produce a *volume* of poems in partnership, and Cottle persuaded them to give him the publication of it. To each was strictly reserved a separate division

of the common field. As Coleridge reports it, there was an understanding between the friends that Coleridge's "endeavours should be directed to the giving a human interest and semblance of truth to persons and characters supernatural or at least romantic, sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith; while Wordsworth proposed as his object to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, to awaken the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom, and direct it to the wonders and loveliness of the world before us." Two years later, however, Wordsworth represented *his* motive as having been "to ascertain, how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement a *selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation*, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted which a poet may rationally endeavour to impart." And in this object Wordsworth at the same time asserted, that he was not disappointed—"a greater number," he says, "have been pleased than I ventured to hope I should please." His hopes cannot have been very high; 500 copies were struck off for the first edition; the larger portion of these Cottle, after a sufficient experience of the slowness of their sale, parted with at a great loss to a London firm, called Arch, whose name therefore appears on the title-page of most of the surviving copies. And when, still later, Cottle transferred the whole of his copyrights to the Longmans, the estimate of the value of that of the *Lyrical Ballads* made for that firm was "nothing,"

and they gladly returned it at his request to Cottle, who made a present of it to the authors. Southey, who was already an acquaintance, and was eventually to be an intimate and specially cherished friend of Wordsworth as for years he had been of Coleridge, showed but a qualified respect for any of the pieces in his notice of the publication in the *Critical Review*; at best the volume was regarded as a sort of Rob Roy, "ower bad for blessing, ower good for banning." Yet it made an impression—and a very deep one on some minds, of which two at least were minds far above the common. De Quincey, then a mere lad, though a lad of rare precocity and acuteness, found in those poems "the ray of a new morning" and "an absolute revelation of untrodden worlds, teeming with power and beauty as yet unsuspected amongst men." And he assures us that "Professor Wilson received the same startling and profound inspiration from the same volume." It must be borne in mind, too, that many years had still to pass before De Quincey or Wilson became known to either of the authors; their judgment was therefore unaffected by friendship, a feeling that may have coloured Lamb's, which was also very favourable. Undoubtedly the seed sown had fallen on some patches of the best ground, where it could not fail to bring forth abundant fruit in time.

The doubting reception given to the volume is now seen to have been in good measure the fault of the authors themselves. Like nearly every man to whom new truths have been revealed, Wordsworth got possessed by them and became their bond-slave,

following his doctrines blithely into any extreme their application might lead to, becoming at times a very simpleton in his simplicity.

Nor had he in his composition much more than a trace of that infallible corrective spice of all excessive earnestness, humour. Abandoning himself without check or misgiving to an absolute faith in sheer simplicity, whose value was golden whatever its form, he admitted into his verse expressions and strokes of minute description that no poem could keep and live, and that seemed expressly introduced to supply matter for the jeers and mockery of the opposite faction—thus, in Henry Taylor's words, "wantonly exposing himself to the buffoons of criticism." And whole poems, too, are of such a character as to make them fair game for the same "harpy brood." Wordsworth's worst offences in this way have been blotted out of the existing volumes of his works ; but passages still remain that the best-affected reader glides over with a sinking heart and is glad to get to the end of. The ridicule of critics has made the worst specimens fairly familiar. It is but fair to repeat, however, that that notorious childishness, the "dear brother Jim" of *We are Seven*, was Coleridge's doing, and that Wordsworth did not like, though he submitted to, it. It would indeed have been surprising if such innocences as these had not brought discredit on the whole publication, for in those days readers of verse had much less patience with the freaks and dotages of simplicity than they have now. Experiments should be fairly tried ; this one was not, yet it eventually succeeded.

Wordsworth

II.

THE first issue of the *Lyrical Ballads*, as we have seen, found comparatively few readers and still fewer admirers ; most of them seeming, to the occasional Arthur Donnithorne, into whose hands they fell, but “ twaddling stuff,” with which the malice of “ Governour Time ”¹ would make short work. No need to show you how far otherwise it proved. The storm of ridicule and reprobation that raged against these compositions so long is now still longer overpast ; and the impression made and consequences of that impression can be fairly estimated. It must always be remembered, however, that every subsequent publication of these poems as a separate volume—of which there were *three*, in 1800, 1802 and 1805—was accompanied by a second volume of additional poems, entirely of Wordsworth’s composition, more numerous than those of the earlier, and of which the best were—with a single exception—superior to the best of the earlier. Their due weight

¹ “ Some he stifles in their cradles, others he frights into convulsions, whereof they suddenly die ; some he flays alive, others he tears limb from limb. Great numbers are offered to Moloch, etc., etc.”

—which to my mind is decidedly greater than that of the former—must be given to the new and less otherwise discredited poems of this second volume. Moreover, two fresh volumes were added to these two, in 1807, containing much of special power to penetrate to quick and generative minds ; and must be included in the estimate.

It is these four volumes, whose issue embraces nine years, that constitute the force whose effects are now the question. These effects can only be indicated here. They seem sufficiently obvious—at least to the observer who is content with appearances. It may be that these do not amount in the world of English letters, as some have thought, to those of the French Revolution in the world of Society and Politics ; these writings of Wordsworth may not have so radically and universally revolutionised the spirit and form of the national poetry as to give their publication a claim to be loftily described as the birth-death of that Poetry ; but undoubtedly to no single source can the forces that wrought the notable change, falling little short of a revolution, in that section of our literature, be so plausibly traced. All our genuine poets, even those of the second rank, that have written since 1798, have written very differently from those that wrote before 1798 ; poetry has borne a totally different character, is animated by a totally different spirit, has very different aims and ideals, shows quite another image and superscription since 1798 ; and though this character, spirit, image and superscription cannot be distinctly recognised as Wordsworth's,

they can yet be seen to be largely the outcome, indirect, if not direct, of his action and influence,

It is undeniable that his writings in the mass were even unpopular for a whole generation ; but to the working of the effects before us popularity was not needed ; the sole requisite was that this new force in poetry should be brought in contact with the proper minds, with those that had it in them to receive and transmit the sacred fire. It is, I believe, an undisputed fact of literary history that all the poetically gifted minds then in growth did feel at least the warmth of this fire ; Scott, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Landor and the rest, all caught the fervour, if not all the chastened spirit, of this master of Nature's secrets ; indeed, if we accept Macaulay's conclusion, we must regard Byron, the most certain of all to resent criticism, the most vociferously antagonistic to Wordsworth, as being in the main the populariser of Wordsworth's poetical habitudes, " the interpreter," as he words it, " between Mr. Wordsworth and the multitude." Every one of these men sat, consciously or unconsciously, at the feet of Wordsworth. The spirit he worked in and the forms it practically assumed put on very different aspects in the personalities of those distinguished writers, but the unlikenesses, even the contrasts, are fully accounted for by the different natures and circumstances of the men. The manifestations of the new spirit when incarnated in Shelley, who basked exultingly in the noon-tide of the hottest revolutionary sun, could not fail to contrast with those of the single-minded disciple of unsophisticated Nature. This

conclusion is, perhaps, not far from the truth—that the *Lyrical Ballads* were the first effective gush of the pure well-head of Poesy for the modern world of England.

The second took place at a very different scene from the Quantocks, at Goslar, in Germany. After leaving Bristol the brother and sister had been joined by Coleridge ; the three had then sailed from Yarmouth to Hamburg, where, in a short time, Coleridge had again parted from them in quest of the choicest German metaphysics, Wordsworth and Dorothy proceeding to Goslar with the less ambitious design of learning the German language. There they lived for four months, from October, 1798, till February, 1799. Their selection of Goslar was unfortunate ; it was one of the coldest towns in North Germany, and the winter of 1798-99 proved, we are told, the severest of the whole century. So fierce was the cold that the people in whose house Wordsworth lodged expected that he would be frozen to death in his bedroom some night. Conditions seemingly more unfavourable for “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” of poetical ones at any rate, could not well be conceived, but at no former time, not even in the preceding spring among the Quantocks, did such feelings overflow with Wordsworth to happier results. It may have been that Wordsworth’s vein, like Milton’s, flowed more happily between the autumnal equinox and the vernal ; it may have been only the caprice of the Muse ; but it is the literal truth that not only did several of the poet’s most delicate creations take their present shape during those bitter

months, but also every poem then composed, with but a single exception, still ranks in the best class of Wordsworth's work—a thing that can be said of no other part of his history ; at no other time did his productions maintain so nearly uniform and constant an excellence. His life at Goslar enables us to verify the general truth of the assurance he gives us in the Tintern Abbey Poem :—

“ These beauteous forms
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye :
But oft, in lonely rooms and mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood and felt along the heart.”

For not a single composition of this Goslar time—except one, and that the only failure—draws its subject from Goslar ; nearly all the others embody beauteous or pathetic forms or experiences of the past. Here is well nigh the whole sum—*Nutting*, *The Poet's Epitaph*, *Matthew*, *The Fountain*, *The Two April Mornings*, *Ruth*, the three Lucy poems, the so-called—but not by Wordsworth—*Education of Nature* and *Lucy Gray*. These are the proofs of the sensations sweet that as he sat in his lonely room, or walked fur-clad on the ramparts, at Goslar, he “felt in the blood and felt along the heart.” *Ruth* too is one of the few among his lengthy compositions that is an unqualified success—indeed a distinct success at all, for it is not in his great designs that Wordsworth's poetical greatness is seen. Nor does this account complete the record of his work at

Goslar ; besides these he wrote and sent to Coleridge a tribute to the memory of a dead schoolmate, afterwards taken into the fifth book of *The Prelude*, planned *The Prelude* and conceived the design of *The Recluse*.

There are few mysteries in the story of Wordsworth's life. The Lucy poems make its great, perhaps its only puzzle. Some regard Lucy as having had a real existence, as having been an early love of the poet's ; and take his never-broken reticence on the subject as a confirmation of their belief. If this be so, and if the local colouring of the poem be the literal fact, the only known part of his history that would fit into the supposition is his third Cambridge vacation, when he describes himself in the sixth book of *The Prelude* as having "explored That streamlet whose blue current works its way Between romantic Dovedale's spiry rocks." But anything—at least anything consistent with the conditions—is possible where nothing is known ; and of the subject or occasion of these three models of artless grace in verse nothing whatever is known. The solitary descent of Wordsworth in this finely sustained flight of his genius is that depressing burst of merriment—perhaps the only attempt he ever made to be funny in verse—Lines written in Germany, on one of the coldest days of the century. It has, however, the positive value—that it furnishes a picture of the principal circumstances in which some of the finest poems we have were written ; and the negative—that it shows how little of a humorist its author was.

On February 10th, 1799, brother and sister turned their backs upon Goslar and their faces towards

England—how gladly is told in the first paragraph of *The Prelude* and the beginning of the seventh book, for he then began work on this singular autobiographical poem, which he did not finish till six years later, and did not himself publish at all ; the world did not get it till after his death. In the spring they were again in England. They passed the rest of the year mainly with their friends, the Hutchinsons, at Sockburn-on-Tees, the poet indulging his roving propensity, however, from time to time, once in company with Coleridge, whom he then made acquainted for the first time with the Lake Country. This last proved an important excursion, leading as it did to the momentous resolution of making the vale of Grasmere his fixed abode ; in December he and Dorothy set out from Sockburn on foot to establish themselves in a small cottage he had taken, and after a walk of four days, on one of which the subject for *Hart-leap Well* was picked up, they arrived at their new home on St. Thomas's Eve—the 20th of December, 1799 ; and at once entered into possession not of Townend Cottage merely, but of Grasmere Vale, and all the rest of the Lake region as well, which soon became known as Wordsworth's Country, and will perhaps be allowed to remain so a few more generations. The late Mr. Matthew Arnold thought this a most regrettable step on Wordsworth's part, describing it with a sigh as his entrance into a monastery. For reasons that ought to be easily gathered from things I have said already, I am not at all disposed to echo Mr. Arnold's sigh ; I do not feel the slightest regret, but gratitude rather,

that the Time-spirit took care not to play the dog in the fable, and held it safer to keep the "goods" it had, than fly in quest of others that it knew not of. And what we could hardly have failed to miss, had Mr. Arnold and not the Time-spirit had, at this critical moment, the control of Wordsworth's destiny—though, *perhaps*, we might have got something better—is eloquently expressed by Mr. Lowell. "As in Catholic countries men go for a time into retreat from the importunate dissonances of life to collect their better selves again by communion with things that are heavenly and therefore eternal, so this Chartreuse of Wordsworth, dedicated to the Genius of Solitude, will allure to its imperturbable calm the finer natures and more highly tempered intellects of every generation, so long as man has any intuition of what is most sacred in his own emotions and sympathies, or of whatever in outward nature is most capable of awakening them and making them operative, whether to console or strengthen."

In this monastery of his choice—a somewhat spacious one, for it embraced the whole of Lakeland at least—the poet's cell for the first nine years was Townend or Dove Cottage, as were then its alternative names, Wordsworth Cottage, as it is called now. This modest shelter he glorified in verse over and over again; and the fragment of *The Recluse*, which was first published only in 1888, is a thoughtful and not unmelodious record of his early feelings towards it, and his first sensations, experiences, expectations and aspirations in Grasmere Vale. To my thinking this is a most

expressive and valuable poem ; not only whole passages but also the spirit and pitch of the work throughout entitle it to rank with the best in both kinds of the author's long compositions ; no single book of *The Prelude* or *The Excursion* is equal to it. And it has the great interest of being the first-fruits of its writer's genius after its transplantation to the Lake Country.

The more noticeable of the other poems that show us the outside or inside, or the garden-plot, of Dove Cottage are the *Butterfly* (second poem), *Personal Talk*, the Sonnet that begins with "Fly, some kind harbinger, to Grasmere - dale," the fourth paragraph of *The Waggoner*, and a passage in the fifth book of *The Excursion* ; the appearances of Grasmere expressed or disguised are innumerable. Just thirty years before Wordsworth settled in that vale a poet of a sensibility to external nature exceptional at his time passed through it, and was moved to the warmest admiration of the whole scene, describing it as "one of the sweetest landscapes that art ever attempted to imitate." This poet was Gray, then (1769) in the last year but one of his life.

Now, I am not quite sure that certain other words regarding Grasmere from the just quoted journal of Gray were not in Wordsworth's mind when he wrote his *Admonition*. Gray says: "Not a single red tile, no flaming gentleman's house, or garden walls break in upon the repose of this little unsuspected paradise, but all is peace, rusticity and happy poverty in its neatest, most becoming attire." Writing in his finest

mood and manner of the typical Grasmere Cottage, Wordsworth exclaims—

“ Roof, window, door,
The very flowers are sacred to the poor ;
The roses to the porch which they entwine.”

Once he had set up his rest in this Paradise, the Poet returned to his appointed work of raising his fair Chartreuse for the kindred spirits of this busy world, adding stone, and shaft and polished corner as occasion arose and the spirit prompted. He was now in the *third* year of his great time, and the tide of song was still at its highest ; no wonder then that it gave birth to such masterpieces as *The Brothers*, *Michael*, *Hart-leap Well*, *The Pet Lamb*, *Ellen Irwin*, and the *Childless Father*—productions that are not, however, all on the same level of excellence. Yet though this, the year 1800, has been reckoned his *annus mirabilis*, the proportion of its *mirabilia*, of its distinctly wonderful work, work of the centre, as the critical phrase is, has sunk markedly below that of the physically-benumbing time spent in Goslar ; too many of the poems of this year—the Poems on the naming of Places, *The Waterfall and the Eglantine*, *The Idle Shepherd Boys*, *Rural Architecture* and *Andrew Jones*, for instance—are examples of his second best manner only, perhaps not all, even of that. Good undoubtedly most of these are, yet not of the best. That marvel of noble simplicity, however, *Michael*, alone would suffice to redeem a multitude even of failures ; without a single pretentious line, without a single brilliant word or phrase, with little verbal music to give it charm, this simple narrative of rustic love,

betrayed faith and hopeless sorrow ranks among the most powerful products of the pen of man. Never has genius of the first order been so fitful in its workings as Wordsworth's; even in the midst of its richest midsummer luxuriance strange seasons of utter saplessness would intervene; it is barely credible, yet must be believed, that the sole blossoms of the fourth year of his great flowering time, the year 1801, were *The Sparrow's Nest* and the sonnet glorifying Skiddaw that begins with "Pelion and Ossa flourish side by side"; the modernizations from Chaucer, and the composition of *The Prelude*, which seem to have made the *labour* of the year for him, were not a third time interrupted by the intrusion of his higher genius.

But the next year, the fifth, made ample and noble amends for the barrenness of its predecessor. What is now recognised as his higher genius reasserted itself with hitherto unexampled power; in the number of poems of the finer type that it produced it far exceeds the products in the same kind of any previous year; and the general quality of these is at least not far from his highest. It gave birth to his earliest verses on wild flowers—which are, I think, the best—two on the Celandine and three on the Daisy—to *Beggars*, *To the Cuckoo*, *The Brothers*, *Water* and *Natural Piety* poems; to *Resolution and Independence*, to both the *Butterfly* poems, to the *Castle of Indolence* stanzas and the address to little Hartley Coleridge. Its great distinction, however, is his first and most splendid outburst of sonneteering energy. No poet has cultivated the art

of sonnet-writing to happier results than Wordsworth ; yet, though he had given one fair proof of his mastery of this superb form of verse before, he did not attempt to launch out into it till now. And the occasion that led to most, perhaps all of his sonnets of the prime, was a political event, the Peace of Amiens. His thoughts had now begun to work with grave effect on the career of Napoleon ; he had joined the extraordinary rush of visitors to Paris that took place the moment the gates of France were thrown open by the peace ; and the sights he saw there and the feelings those and the general situation inspired, moved him to the composition of some eighteen sonnets, ten of which at least have never been surpassed. Wordsworth's practice of this nice and fascinating art was always consummate ; among its masters in English he certainly stands first, alike in the amount he has written and the profound and solemn beauty of sentiment and expression that pervades the bulk of it ; in it too his hand kept its peerless cunning longer than in any other kind of verse, yet he never outdid, and rarely equalled, the best of his first efforts. About the Westminster Bridge sonnet it is possible to raise a cavil ; but the deep, musical and contagious thoughtfulness, the exalted and solemn tone of : " It is a beauteous evening, calm and free " ; " Once did she hold the gorgeous east in fee " ; " Inland, within a hollow vale, I stood " ; and, " Milton ! thou should'st be living at this hour "—not to mention three or four others—are of power to stir the most insensible spirit. No poems of Wordsworth are so weighty with strong, rich and manly feeling as

his sonnets ; and among his sonnets these stand conspicuously in the front rank.

Towards the end of this year—October 4th, 1802—he married Mary Hutchinson, his sister's friend and his own ; who came to him from the household at Sockburn-on-Tees (now transplanted to Gallow Hill, near Scarborough), where he and Dorothy had found a temporary home three years before. This marriage is another example of his magnificent luck in life. Mrs. Wordsworth was in many ways a strong contrast to her husband ; she was cheerful and genial, and though the thriftiest of housewives and most careful of managers, was in much greater esteem among her humbler neighbours than her somewhat ungenial, shy and reserved partner, for she was frank of speech and outwardly sympathetic with all. De Quincey's account of her and her husband, in the second volume of the *Autobiographic Sketches*, is of great value. Yet in justice to Wordsworth De Quincey's somewhat amusing exposition of the impossibility of conceiving Wordsworth in the character of lover ought to be corrected by a passage from one of his sister's letters. "There never lived a woman," says De Quincey, "whom he would not have lectured and admonished under circumstances that should have seemed to require it, nor would he have conversed with her in any mood whatever, without wearing an air of mild condescension to her understanding." "William's affection," wrote Dorothy, "demonstrates itself every moment of the day, when the objects of his affection are present with him, in a thousand almost imperceptible attentions to

their wishes, in a sort of restless watchfulness which I know not how to describe, in a tenderness that never sleeps, and at the same time such a delicacy of manner as I have observed in few men." And long afterwards a friend said to Wordsworth, "De Quincey says your wife is much too good for you." The poet at once turned a full and very serious look upon the speaker and said with great vehemence, "Did he say that? Now that is so true that I am ready to believe anything else he may say." But no authority can well be trustier or pleasanter to consult than the poet's own verse, which on this subject is fairly copious and varied.

For ante-nuptial glimpses, though post-nuptially given, we have the two passages of *The Prelude*, the first in the sixth, the second in the fourteenth book; from the latter of which it seems a clear conclusion that the occasion of which it speaks—a visit of Mary Hutchinson to Alfoxden — witnessed the ripening of the long acquaintance into the requisite fitness for the tenderest of human relations :—

"She came, no more a phantom to adorn
A moment, but an inmate of the heart,
And yet a spirit, there for me enshrined
To penetrate the lofty and the low."

But his only ante-nuptial song, if song it may be called, is the copy of verses to M. H. in the poems on the Naming of Places; and this is a most sedate picture of the scene of a most sedate courtship, yet not without the implication of something better. That was two years before marriage; *A Farewell* expresses the

expectations and feelings with which he set out with his sister to marry and bring home the lady ; on the evening of his marriage day he wrote, to beguile the time, a sonnet that has no allusion to the event of the day. But two years after marriage he burst into real song—unmistakable note of gladness, admiration and gratitude, showing distinctly that the better had proved the very best of its kind—the famous Phantom of Delight stanzas, which present three successive pictures of her life—as a child when she was his schoolfellow at Cockermouth, as a grown-up woman when she was his sister's friend and his own, and as his wife. So much of his later verse speaks the same feeling, only deeper and stronger, that a selection must content us. First and foremost is the Dedication of *The White Doe of Rylstone*. In 1820 a visit to Oxford supplied the inspiration of two not overpoweringly meritorious sonnets, when he exulted in the thought that she too was at his side.

“ Who with her heart's experience satisfied
Maintains inviolate its slightest vow.”

Four years afterwards, the calm satisfaction of this utterance gave place to a different but even more significant strain, a strange cry of apprehension wrung from him by a sense of his own unworthiness, the verses that begin with “ Oh dearer far than life and light are dear ”—a poem whose thought little resembles but whose significance and purpose remind the reader of our late laureate's “ Dear, near and true.” These are not by any means all—there are others of the same

time ; and fourteen years afterwards the painting of her portrait by Miss Margaret Gillies prompted the writing of two sonnets, one of which at least shows that, old as he was, on one subject he could still be poetical, could still not inadequately express emotion in verse. We may suspect that this deep satisfaction was not so uniformly the wife's portion as it was the husband's ; a naïve disclosure in the preface of the *Ode to Duty* suggests that he occasionally carried his theory of "wise passiveness" to an extreme that taxed the patience of both wife and sister—"many and many a time," he confesses, "have I been twitted by my wife and sister for having forgotten this dedication of myself to the stern law-giver"—so inconsiderate will the best of women be at times. Yet everything we read or hear of this sacred ground of the poet's life goes to prove that husband and wife were as blessed in each other as poet and poet's wife could be wished to be, but in the general belief seldom have been. It is interesting to know that Mrs. Wordsworth too could sparkle into verse of the right Wordsworthian stamp, though but for a single brief moment ; we have her husband's word for her authorship of "They flash upon that inward eye Which is the bliss of solitude" in his poem of the *Daffodils*, and for their being its best lines, so good indeed that, "if thoroughly felt, they would annihilate nine-tenths of the reviews of the kingdom." And in this respect she, as the wife of one laureate, found a not unworthy successor in the wife of his successor, as the world first learnt from Professor Palgrave's *Treasury of Sacred Song*.

Wordsworth's great time still continued, though already, I think, if not on the wane, distinctly approaching the wane. As yet he had published nothing of his finest mintage but the two volumes of *Lyrical Ballads*, nor was he to try his fortune with the public again till 1807; for the two further volumes of that year the materials were during these years slowly but surely accumulating, and *The Prelude* too was growing. The fruitful event of 1803 was his first tour in Scotland, which was taken with his sister—and with Coleridge also, till hypochondria and melancholy deprived them of his companionship—in the autumn and on an Irish jaunting car, in which their course can be tracked along its main lines by the poet's verses and with all fulness by Dorothy's journal.

Some twenty compositions made the harvest of this adventure, most written while it was still in progress, for now the emotions are generally taken at the moment of their rise, are no longer left to be recollected in tranquillity; the fitting experience is followed at once by its expression in verse. In these he exhibits his characteristic inequality; better work than six—*The Highland Girl*, *Stepping Westward*, *Rob Roy's Grave*, *Glen Almain*, *The Solitary Reaper*, and *Yarrow Unvisited*—never came from his hand; and of these one, *The Solitary Reaper*, transcends, to my apprehension, in thrilling effect, in magical yet thoroughly natural melody of expression, the highest among his other poems. It is the *ne plus supra* of the lyrist's art, as practised by Wordsworth. A distinctly lower place must be assigned to the three pieces on Burns,

touched though they are with fine sympathy, and instinct at times with delicate human feeling. Yet they have an interest in connection with the supposed kinship of Wordsworth's gift with that of Burns, and the supposed influence of the latter's writings on his growing genius. I am incapable of seeing the first to any marked degree, and the second at all. Till this year, 1803, no mention of or mark of interest in Burns appears in Wordsworth's compositions or reported conversations ; and though he was moved in the now dominant mood to look back regretfully on the lost opportunity that their neighbourhood afforded—

“ Alas ! where'er the current tends
Regret pursues and with it blends ;
Huge Criffel's hoary top ascends,
By Skiddaw seen.
Neighbours we were, and loving friends
We might have been.”

yet not a hint is given of his ever having thought of such a thing in Burns's lifetime. And by the time that Burns died, 1796, he had travelled much and in very distant lands ; but his interest in Burns did not carry him across the Solway. His admiration of and compassion for the ill-starred Scotsman, often expressed and sincere as they were, came later. The most popular of the group is *Yarrow Unvisited*. Its charm is perhaps none the less that it is pure imagination from beginning to end ; even the trivial incident given as its incentive was created. Perhaps none of his productions did so much towards widening the poet's audience, towards

gaining the general ear, a result to which in all likelihood its blitheness and ease of movement chiefly contributed. It was the first, I think, to become a public favourite; had it not been exceptionally well known, Maginn would hardly have made it the model for his humorous fling on Byron's *Don Giovanni*.

For five years more the even tenor of his way was unbroken; each year substantially repeating its predecessor—save that in one a heavy affliction befell him.

In 1805 his brother John, the Captain of the *Abergavenny* East Indiaman, while sailing on the voyage that was to crown his little fortune and enable him to live with William for the rest of his life, was lost with his ship on the rocks of Portland; and Wordsworth knew for the first time what heavy sorrow meant. For the last time too, we might almost say, till his daughter Dora's death three years before his own. This sorrow twice struggled to find direct utterance and relief in song, first in the fourth poem *To the Daisy*, and then in the Elegiac Verses to his brother's memory—with a hardly adequate result, I think, on either occasion. This imperfect success ought not to raise misgivings regarding the quality of the poet's sorrow; poetical biography and our noblest elegies, the expressive speech and no less expressive silence of our great masters, may be taken to prove that the big, crushing griefs, the bereavements that darken or desolate the homestead, seldom, perhaps never, give voice in song, or break down in the effort

as these have done.¹ The subject of each of our four classical and masterly utterances of sorrow in verse is the death of a friend merely, when the mind's sadness is but a sentiment, a pervading melancholy, that stimulates thought while kindling emotion. And it is no contradiction of this theory that in the Elegiac Stanzas suggested by the picture of Peele Castle in a storm, written while his wound was still green, Wordsworth achieves a real success, for in this the grief is only a disturbing presence in the scene, not the central force that is in possession of the mind, though lying very close to it. Even the Lines on Fox's approaching death, the composition of the following year, seem to me distinctly more effective than those that mourn the loss of his brother. And all lovers of *The Happy Warrior*—1806—the most lovable in most ways of all Wordsworth's ideals—will be glad to know that the elements of John Wordsworth's character contributed much to the highly-finished picture. Otherwise this was a calm and prosperous time for Wordsworth. He was making friends and adding, though slowly, to his admirers. Southey and he had now come to understand, and were soon to love each other, if they had not done so already; the generous Scott was his friend, and even his guest, despite the frugality of his board; the shy De Quincey had at

¹ See what Tickell says on this point in his great elegy:

“What mourner ever felt poetic fires?
 Slow comes the verse, that real woe inspires;
 Grief unaffected suits but ill with art,
 Or flowing numbers with a bleeding heart.”

last ventured to the shrine he had so long desired yet dreaded to visit. And Lamb and he had long been on even affectionate terms. But his great acquisition in these years was the friendship of Sir George Beaumont of Coleorton in Leicestershire; Sir George was undoubtedly the most valued and most valuable of the good things in this kind that love of his verse and respect for his character had brought him; from none did Wordsworth draw so much of the special material that made his happiness as from him and his family. Sir George's name is connected with Wordsworth's by a hundred links; pre-eminently by the Sonnet *Upon the Sight of a Beautiful Picture*, and his memory is effectively preserved or gratefully embalmed in the poet's *Epistle to Sir George Beaumont*, which is an idyllic picture of a homely incident in his domestic life, in the *At Applethwaite* Sonnet, as well as in the *Lines on the picture of Peele Castle*. Several other pieces, the *Coleorton* included, we also owe to this friendship, though the debt is not great.

Among the ominously increasing proportion of pieces of the second or third order produced in these years stand, in marked contrast to their fellows—besides those already noticed—*Fidelity*, *Stray Pleasures*, and the *Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle*, though a laxer principle of selection might add to these the *Affliction of Margaret*, the *Kitten and the Falling Leaves*, the third poem on the *Celandine*, *Louisa*, the *Force of Prayer*, and one or two others. The mighty Ode, called by Emerson the high-water mark of English verse in these later times, surely demands a separate notice. Here,

if anywhere, we have the full sum of Wordsworth's powers in heightened and harmonious action, deep thought and swelling emotion, abounding life, and "the depth but not the tumult of the soul"; all have gone in. It is true that Mr. Arnold and Mr. Swinburne have rather pronounced against the general acceptance of this work as its author's lyrical masterpiece; the first finding it somewhat declamatory, the second preferring the *Ode to Duty*. And the existence of grounds for their dissent is indisputable — it is declamatory in places, and the *Ode to Duty* has one stanza that for exalted truth and its adequate musical expression beats any single passage of equal length in the greater Ode. I venture to predict, however, that the uncritical instinct of impressionable readers will eventually be seen to have chosen more correctly than the exercised acumen of professional criticism.

The Ode is a far longer poem than the *Ode to Duty*—and in a contest between two creations of admitted excellence greater length ought surely to tell; it soars to a high pitch at the outset; and this pitch is sustained with unflagging wing to its last line; the noble power that sweeps through it is the union of all the best elements of the highest poetry; and the very vagueness of the beautiful though not original conception that it sets forth adds to its impressiveness. It has certainly influenced a greater number of different types of mind than any other poem of its author's. But Wordsworth's was not the first poetical treatment of the great elemental thought; *The Retreat* of Henry Vaughan the Silurist, a much earlier poem, is as brief, terse

and penetrating as the Ode is extended, diffuse and sonorous ; and there is a serious mental mood to which *it* is more congenial than the Ode. The resemblances between the two poems are too striking to be securely regarded as accidental ; and Wordsworth is known to have had a copy of Vaughan's poems in his possession before he wrote the Ode. Nor was this grand volume of verse a continuous work ; an interval of two years divides it into two not very, but still distinguishable parts ; and the transition seems to me at once felt the moment it is made.

We may now suppose ourselves at the end of the poet's great time, whether we take this, as some do, to have been 1806, or, as Mr. Arnold, 1808. Undoubtedly the periodical yield of his finer, his unique genius, has, after even the earlier date, become comparatively scanty, that of his inferior mood proportionately abundant. Still his best is far from being altogether absent ; and his subsequent career furnishes much other matter of value—all of which must be reserved for the next lecture.

I will close this with a word or two on Wordsworth's political opinions and the change they underwent, a change branded by some as an apostasy. It is undeniable that his youthful feelings, aspirations and political beliefs went strongly with the Revolution ; those of his ripening manhood towards Whiggism or a strangely qualified Toryism ; those of his ripened manhood into a decided, yet not unqualified, Toryism, where they remained in entire content for the rest of his life. Some may perhaps reasonably deplore

this change ; but no candid mind will see anything extraordinary, much less anything dishonouring, in it ; there is nothing in it that two considerations will not amply account for—that Wordsworth had grown older and the Revolution had grown older ; the seeing mind and the thing seen had materially altered their characters. Even in the poet's first political attitude two facts seem to me unquestionable—though the contrary of one of them has been assumed by a great genius :—(1) that Wordsworth was never, in any sense or possible application of the word, a political leader, a propagator of political or social doctrines, as Coleridge was—no writings or reported words of his were intended for the spread of revolutionary principles, there was little or no overflow of these feelings into his verse ; and (2) his opinions would seem to have sprung from certain peculiar circumstances and sentiments, of which the former might change and the latter lose their significance.

Wordsworth lived as a boy and a young man among the poor, had lived in part the very life of the poor ;¹ he learned to feel with them and for them, to understand and love them as no other man of genius of his social class has ever done ; when his divine faculty declared itself, he adopted the character of the poet of the poor

¹ “ Our daily meals were frugal, Sabine fare !
 More than we wished we knew the blessing then
 Of vigorous hunger—hence corporeal strength
 Unsapped by delicate viands ; for, exclude
 A little weekly stipend, and we lived
 Through three divisions of the quartered year
 In penniless poverty.”—*Prelude* ii., par. 4.

and assumed the task of interpreting their inner life, the life of their thoughts and souls, to the general mind of England. For this he believed himself well fitted, for he had the gift of song and a thorough and intimate knowledge of the rural poor and an absolute sympathy with them. Moreover, his one experience of the aristocracy was a bitter one; he had experience of but one nobleman in those days, and him he had found a swindler and a cheat, who had robbed him and his orphaned brothers and sisters, at a time when their need was sorest. Hence naturally sprang those high-flown ideas, views and hopes of the stirring lines that he wrote in 1805 on Revolutionary Enthusiasm but did not publish till 1810—lines, however, that are purely historical, are simply the record yielded up by memory—they only explain the grounds of youthful enthusiasm, do not seek to recommend them. In the letter to the great Whig statesman, Fox, which he sent with a presentation copy of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1801, the toning down of his former vehemence, and the coming-on of the opposite sentiment, seem to me clear enough. The change came some time in the first decade of the century, perhaps hastened but certainly not originated by the generous pecuniary atonement that the son of the swindling peer made for his father's sin.

It is an exceedingly simple case; an English citizen who happened to be a most original poet, held one set of political opinions when he was young, the opposite set in maturity and old age, but without swerving a hair's breadth from the poetical principles of which he was the apostle. In the province of poetry

only was Wordsworth a leader ; in that province only could he have become an apostate ; in that province he remained unchanged till his life's end.

This subject must not be dismissed without some reference to what I take to be an unprovoked outrage committed on Wordsworth's posthumous reputation by a brother poet, who ought to have known his ground better. Thanks to Mr. Browning's own communications, that poet's vigorous poem, *The Lost Leader*, is, and will always remain, closely associated with Wordsworth's name ; the now prevalent notion—which after all is only inaccurate—that our poet was that traitorous and corrupt personage, will continue to prevail and more or less poison men's minds against Wordsworth. His own reported statement and the following passage from an explanatory letter leave no doubt that he went a good way towards so meaning it : “ I did use,” writes Mr. Browning, “ the great and venerated personality of Wordsworth as a sort of painter's model, one from which this or the other particular feature may be selected and turned to account.” This painter's model must have been a Wordsworth of Mr. Browning's own creating ; there is not traceable—at least by me—a single feature, a single lineament, a single fact in the history of the real Wordsworth, that bears the faintest likeness to those ascribed in the poem to the Lost Leader. Indeed, some of these are even grotesquely the opposite to the true facts of Wordsworth's conduct, character and history. I hold it no mean offence to have so sullied a great and stainless name by connecting it in men's minds with

treason of the most sordid and despicable description, by not merely allowing, but telling men, to think of Wordsworth as of a man of which it was conceivably fair to write—

“ Just for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a riband to stick in his coat.”

Yet this calumny of Browning's has not even the questionable merit of being original ; the father of the falsehood—from whom it may be suspected that its most active propagator really first borrowed it—was an earlier—and by not a few thought a greater—poet than Mr. Browning, Shelley.

Wordsworth

III.

WORDSWORTH'S second cell in his expansive Monastery was Allan Bank, a half-obvious, half-retiring house somewhat above the head of the Grasmere lake. What with wife, sister, sisters-in-law, and an occasional visitor, and what with the successive appearances of more importunate claimants on the stinted accommodation of Dove Cottage whose claims could not readily be put aside, the necessity for a roomier seclusion had become so urgent that the whole household had to be transplanted, for the winter of 1806-7, to Coleorton, where Sir George Beaumont lent them a house, and for a part of the next the poet and Mrs. Wordsworth had to live with the latter's brother near Stockton. In 1808 Allan Bank offered this roomier seclusion; and its offer was at once accepted. There they passed three years, stocked with the usual Wordsworthian felicities. His third cell was the Grasmere Parsonage, to which the owner's wish to live himself in Allan Bank obliged him to shift his abode in 1811; and the Parsonage, divided by the road from the Church and Churchyard—"The Churchyard among the mountains" of *The Excursion*—was their home for two years. A happy home, of course, but

twice, and in the same year, clouded with sorrow : in June, 1812, its younger daughter, Catharine, suddenly died ; in the following December its second son, Thomas, died also. The three that remained, however, John, Dora and William — survived into mature manhood and womanhood ; John and William into old age. The father's grief, strong and deep as it was, was not, like the brother's seven years earlier, *too* deep for tears—for “melodious tears” as Milton calls them—and the “Surprised by Joy” and “Desponding Father” sonnets, as well as the brief epitaph on the boy, are not unworthy tributes to the occasion.

From this gloom he passed next year to his fourth and last cell, Rydal Mount. There he practised the monastic virtues peculiar to him and enjoyed the monastic blessedness, perhaps also peculiar to him, for thirty-seven years, undisturbed — save once, by the apprehension of having to leave his pleasant abode. It is with Rydal Mount that the sympathetic imagination now almost exclusively associates his earthly image, though when he entered the house his work as a poet was in the main substantially done ; of his best and second best, comparatively little of the former and not much of the latter had not been already stored up, in manuscript if not in print. Yet there is enough of both to earn gratitude. His compositions on or connected with Rydal Mount are fairly numerous ; yet only one seems to me at all abreast with the front rank of his verse ; and its connection with Rydal is not conveyed in the poem itself, is known from the poet's own statement only.

The self-assuring lines still prefixed to his collected works were written from the point of view of Rydal Mount ; every time we read them we are looking to the nocturnal heavens and earth from that point of view ; for to the onlooker thence the stars on favourable nights so dispose themselves in relation to the constituents of the landscape as to suggest the imagery of the poem. Of the other Rydalian verses I can remember none that do not get lustre from, rather than give lustre to, this now sacred ground ; even the “Adieu, Rydalian laurels” sonnet of 1833 is no exception, considerable as is its personal interest. But our own imagination can easily supply this deficiency of informing verse ; by it the picture of Wordsworth’s life at Rydal Mount with his wife, sister, sisters-in-law and his now growing, then grown and eventually scattering, children—though none of these ever lived far from him—may be painted with confidence.

But whence came the means of supporting the vastly increased obligations imposed by these changes of circumstances and abode ? Raisley Calvert’s legacy, however adaptable to the limited needs of the “plain living and high thinking” of the Quantocks and the ante-nuptial years of Dove Cottage, could hardly have held out long against the multiplying demands of those that followed. Here we come upon the one really surprising element of the poet’s life ; in this as in every other respect he was—in any case his fortune gave him the aspect of being—the peculiar care of the Unseen Powers. It was his singular and constant,

though certainly not highest, felicity, to have provided for him, without any effort or even expressed craving of his own, in sufficient and at length in overflowing measure, the one material—often orally despised yet always heartily appreciated—basis of felicity without which all his other felicities would have surely been somewhat bitter to the taste; for, as Judicious Hooker very wisely saith, “to live virtuously is impossible except we live”; “Joy” might be to Wordsworth “its own security,” but only on condition that there were another kind of security behind it. In the only poem of his that bears the note of despondency, testifying in itself to its author’s deep depression of spirits, he exclaims:—

“ My whole life I have lived in pleasant thought,
As if life’s business were a summer mood :
As if all needful things would come unsought
To genial faith, still rich in genial good :
But how can he expect that others should
Build for him, sow for him, and at his call
Love him, who for himself will take no heed at all ? ”

Now the unreasonable expectations here metaphorically expressed were, whether actually formed or not, much more than realised; the exigency that called for, even the desire that needed for its gratification an addition to Wordsworth’s income, no sooner arose than that addition came unsought, once at least when it was needed neither for exigency nor gratification of desire. This indeed reads in his biography like a fixed and naturally working law. De Quincey’s

narrative of its operation, in the second volume of the *Autobiographic Sketches*, is in his happiest vein of description and humour, and though incorrect, as it would appear, in details, is true in the main, erring perhaps chiefly in falling short of the truth. It is an exhaustive demonstration of his assertion, that “at measured intervals throughout the long sequel”—sequel of the Raisley Calvert incident—“a regular succession of similar windfalls fell in, to sustain his expenditure, in exact concurrence with the growing claims on his purse . . . and which dropped from heaven, as it were, to enable him to range at will in paths of his own choosing.”

His marriage would seem to have brought him a little; the earliest importunate claims that were its consequence were taken by an uncle of his wife's as a notice that some of his savings were wanted—the uncle thereupon saw his duty and died leaving his niece £2,000; then the wicked Lord Lonsdale, who had refused to pay the £5,000 he had borrowed from Wordsworth's father, died also, and the good Lord Lonsdale, who came next, at once paid over to the wronged family £8,500, principal and interest—the greater part of which went to William and Dorothy, the other brothers being already in prosperous circumstances. The death of John, who was unmarried and had made some money, brought another increase to his income; and almost simultaneously with his removal to Rydal the Stamp-Distributor for Westmoreland felt what a seasonable moment it was for dying, and through Lord Lonsdale's interest,

Wordsworth was given the unsolicited post, worth £400 a year; and to this some years later, when the education of his children demanded a further supply, the same office for Cumberland with a return of about the same amount was also voluntarily bestowed upon him. Subsequent changes raised the annual value of these two offices to £1,000. Other valuable gifts of Fortune fell to him besides these—indeed, it seemed difficult for him to shake them off; in 1842, when he resigned the Stamp-distributorship of Cumberland in favour of his younger son, Sir Robert Peel begged his acceptance of an annual pension of £300, and next year appointed him Laureate, thus adding £200 more to his yearly income. And Sir George Beaumont not only was forward in doing him many a substantial kindness when living—one of which was the purchase and present of a portion of land at Applethwaite, to enable him to live if he chose near Coleridge, then residing at Greta Hall, Keswick, but also charged his property after death with the payment of £100 annuity to the poet, to cover the expenses of an annual tour. From these and other such sources his worldly substance had spontaneously increased fully thirty-fold between his coming to Grasmere and his death.

It was far, however, from making a proportionate change in his housekeeping and style of living generally. The thrift and homeliness of his youthful time continued in principle; splendour and display, the sumptuous table and household luxury and ease, were as little to his liking and as little practised when he had thousands a year as they had been in his power when he had barely

a hundred. "Wordsworth was a mean-liver," dalesmen that knew him told Mr. Rawnsley not long ago—meaning by "mean" plain, unpretentious, moderate; and in 1847 Miss Martineau, then his neighbour and acquaintance, praised him to Emerson, "not for his poetry but for thrift and economy; for having afforded to his neighbours an example of a modest household where comfort and culture were secured without any display." He is reported to have had one accomplishment which recommended him to the cottagers his neighbours, rare skill as a chimney-doctor—no case of a smoky chimney was ever known in those parts so desperate as to be incurable by him. Yet the sterling worth of the man receives further, though indirect, confirmation from this very frugality. This never cost him a friend—and in later life he had many staunch friends—distinguished men several of them. Walter Scott found his fare as a guest at Townend Cottage so inadequate to the cravings of his healthy animal nature that he had to find an excuse for going to the Swan Inn every day for a cold cut and porter; even his detection in this clandestine refectory by his host no whit impaired their mutual friendliness, for this fine master of imagination had a sound sense of fact, was never disturbed by the apparition of facts.

In my specification of the sources of Wordsworth's income no mention has been made of profit from his writings. The reason is, this profit was too inconsiderable to be worth mentioning; by the time that Byron's gains in this way had amounted to £20,000 and Scott's to perhaps five times that amount, Wordsworth's did

not exceed £300, though both those poets had begun to write years after him, and though his best works had then been before the public for a quarter of a century. The fact is, the future losers of this venerated leader, the swelling spirits—

“ — who had loved him so, followed him, honoured him,
Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,
Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,
Made him their pattern to live and to die,”

continued to show and do these things without buying his books, and some exhibited their love and reverence by decrying and ridiculing him, by fierce efforts to kick him downstairs. Thoroughly as we have been tutored by critical precept and quoted instances not to trust to contemporary opinion for the truth regarding the merits of new authors, and familiar, therefore, with the lesson as we ought to be, few equally remarkable examples of poetical greatness of the first order being so slow as Wordsworth's to win recognition will be found in the history of English letters. After the fourth edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* the demand for his works even fell off; between 1807, when the third instalment of his poetry was given to the world, and 1820, a single issue—which was a united edition—of these later poems and the *Lyrical Ballads*, was enough to satisfy the public appetite—a single edition in thirteen years. And these included nine-tenths of his finest verse; at *this* feast, as is well known, the good wine was set forth at the beginning; Mr. Lowell's fair Chartreuse was practically finished

in 1807—the four volumes in existence in that year contained, entirely in effect and almost in fact, the materials for the whole priceless structure. Nor could there as yet be any pretence of their being discredited by his longer and heavier productions, for the first-born of these, *The Excursion*, the notorious butt of the gibes of Byron, who found it “drowsy, powzy, and his aversion,” was not published till seven years later.

The slowness of Wordsworth’s rise to fame was doubtless due to more causes than one ; there were, it would appear, several internal and external retardations. The chief internal one was the quality of the work itself, so new and strange, of flavour so delicate, so imperceptible or distasteful to the prevalent palate, which had been formed by the elder poets ; to the perception of the merits of this extraordinary verse and its consequent enjoyment, a radical reform of the general taste in things poetical was indispensable. Of this Wordsworth was himself sensible ; his famous saying that he should¹ “create the taste by which he should be relished” is a proof of it as well of his faith in his destiny. The creation of such a taste was necessarily a slow process ; but it might have been effected sooner had the external retardations not been so many and so strong. Those that are reckoned chief are (1) the unfavourable character of the time during which his

¹ “Never forget what I believe was observed to you by Coleridge, that every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great or original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished.”—*Letter to Lady Beaumont of May 21st, 1807.*

works were struggling to make way, for all such poetry as his, (2) the appearance of rivals in the field who were far more amply furnished with the qualities that win popularity, and (3) the hostility of the most generally trusted organs of literary criticism.

With regard to the first it is alleged that the huge life-and-death conflict with Napoleon so chained the thoughts and attention of the English public as to allow no chance of admission to any original verse but the rousing, inspiriting, swift and trenchant kind, such as was written by Scott, who was then on the crest of the popular wave ; the storm and pressure that dominated men's minds had to pass into a calmer and less intense mood before the gentle and thoughtful strains of Wordsworth could win a patient hearing. The second is based on the supposition for which there may really be good warrant, that the public can relish only one poet at one time, that its favour must be lavished on a single laurelled head, that when there are several the exaltation of one poet pre-supposes the depression of the rest. Thus, as Mr. Arnold alleges, " Scott effaced Wordsworth with the poetry-reading public, Byron effaced him " ; it was not till the death of Byron made an opening for him, left the place of honour vacant in the national heart, that he was allowed to take his due, but only to be discarded thence when his successor in the laureateship rose to distinction. I suspect, however, that the third cause had as much to do with the delay as any other. After the issue of the second two volumes the potent Jeffrey dealt them a vigorous stroke in the *Edinburgh Review*, covering them with

contempt ; and thus set the fashion to the mob of reviewers, who took up the note of contemptuous disapproval and sounded it loud and long. This multiform attack would seem to have had a most damaging effect on the public mind ; it can scarcely have been an accident that there was a practical stoppage of the sale of the *Lyrical Ballads*, of which there was no issue between 1805 and 1815—at which latter date the collection was broken up and distributed with the other poems into the classes that every subsequent edition has followed till lately. In no part of his life does Wordsworth appear to better advantage than in this ; his constancy under the pitiless ridicule and obloquy that assailed him was admirable in the highest degree ; not for a moment did he lose heart or hope or bate a jot of the assurance of coming triumph, though his friends were much grieved for his sake. These he sought to reassure ; writing to one of them, Lady Beaumont, he encourages her in words that have been often quoted before but may assuredly be quoted again : “Trouble not yourself upon their present reception ; of what moment is that compared with what I trust is their destiny ?—to console the afflicted ; to add sunshine to daylight, by making the happy happier ; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think and feel, and, therefore, to become more actively and securely virtuous ; this is their office, which I trust they will faithfully perform, long after we are mouldered in our graves.” This is a memorable passage, expressing as it does with a terseness and nervous strength not always found in

Wordsworth's prose his sense of the beneficent function that lay in and before his poetry.

We must now take one more look at the stream of Wordsworth's verse as it travels onwards to honour or neglect. It is curious that the very year in which Shelley reproached him with having ceased to "weave songs consecrate to truth and liberty"—though the fact was that he had never even begun weaving songs to liberty as understood by Shelley—Wordsworth published for the first time a series of poems that bore that often ill-used word in their descriptive title. These were the "Sonnets dedicated to Liberty," first completely printed in the volumes of 1815—the issue of his poems that, as has been already stated, alone broke the continuity of indifference for thirteen years.

To this series I would ask you to give your special attention; its poetical value falls little, if at all, below the highest, whilst its historical is such as to reflect the utmost honour on Wordsworth's patriotism and political insight. However strong had been his sympathy with the Revolution, he early read, with an accuracy that the event fully demonstrated, the real meaning of Napoleon's career, and took up from the first an attitude towards that immeasurable human force which contrasts strongly with that of some of his fellow-sympathisers with the Revolution, whose prostrate worship of mere intellect or worldly success, or whose factious spite exalted this relentless enemy of their country into a hero, to be toasted and glorified when he triumphed over, to be condoled with and

compassionated when he was smitten down by, the valour of their countrymen. Through the bars of his monastery windows Wordsworth saw deeper and more justly into the real nature of the tremendous strife waged for fourteen years with the all-conquering master of Europe, watching its events and vicissitudes with the profoundest interest and an almost passionate warmth of feeling for the peoples engaged in the seemingly hopeless struggle. In such a case Wordsworth could not feel powerfully without speaking what he felt with all the power the mood could awaken ; and a succession of some threescore pieces, in vast majority sonnets, most of which belong to this series, represents his efforts to express himself on the multitudinous aspects and turns of the momentous struggle. Wordsworth was no Tyrtæus ; poetic faculty of the first order seldom is ; nor in these did he attempt to be so ; those manly and nervous sonnets would seem to have been generally but the outflow of pure personal emotion, each the relief of that which oppressed, animated or elevated his spirit for the moment, though not given to the public till the event or situation that was its theme had long passed, many of them not till the struggle had been concluded, and *its* Tyrtæus's occupation was gone.

Yet, though written but to disburden the writer's heart, most of them have the clear ring, the rousing force, the penetrating accent of genuine patriotism and humanity, which could not fail to stimulate the same sentiments in others. "Snowbroth," indeed, it seems to me, would have been the blood of that

thoughtful Englishman who standing in arms face to face with the enormous issue for himself and others that hung on his country's action, would not feel his whole being strongly stirred by such appeals as "Vanguard of Liberty, ye men of Kent," "The two Voices," "Come ye—who if (which Heaven avert!) the Land," "Another year, another deadly blow," "Six thousand veterans practised in war's game," and "It is not to be thought of that the Flood." These are but a few; the German and the Tyrolese resistance and the tumultuous downpour of Spanish fury on the French; Schill, Hofer, Toussaint and Palafox furnished themes for many others. And there are others still suggested by the situation that strike an even graver note, which is not always one of hope. Such are "O Friend, I know not which way I must look For comfort," "Great men have been among us," "When I have borne in memory what has tamed Great nations," "Here pause: the poet claims at least this praise," and "The world is too much with us."

Still more remain, none altogether unworthy of their august society. And Wordsworth's interpretation of the varied events he thus treats is in the main the now current historical interpretation; his judgement was in entire harmony with what has since proved to be the spirit of history towards those awful workings of the Revolution in arms; indeed, not one of the *master* poets of that day, not even Scott, had the mettle of the historical Englishman in such abundance and so finely tempered as he. Little versed in books as we are told he was, Wordsworth's sympathies went

back to the past with as vigorous a beat as they embraced the present, and stretched into the future.

In this section also *The Happy Warrior* is virtually to be classed; and no poem is too high to mate with *The Happy Warrior*. This is indeed a peerless piece of verse, of a special type of power and beauty, richly-toned and exquisitely-turned; material and workmanship alike perfect of their kind; in Mr. Myers's words "a manual of greatness; there is a Roman majesty in its simple and weighty speech." When Miss Martineau told the poet, then in his old age, that Dr. Channing of Boston prized it higher than any other of his, "Depend upon it," said the old gentleman with great impressiveness, "it is because it offers such a chain of valooable thoughts." The "valoo" of every thought it contains is indisputable; but it is the manner and the effect of their combination that have wrought the wonder. Begun and in part executed as an embodiment of the idealised Nelson, it was so far affected by the poet's sense of the graver flaws in the mighty seaman's character as to move him to draw upon that of his own brother John, himself the ideal but unrevealed Nelson without his faults, and then gradually went on working into itself the qualities of the perfect leader in War, till, altogether unknown to or unsuspected by its author, the best parts of the best captains—even of one whose greatness had not yet been manifested—had been woven into the masterly picture. There is not only a good bit of Nelson in it, but considerable bits of John Churchill, James Wolfe, Montcalm, and, strangest feat of all, of Arthur Wellesley,

though two years had yet to pass before the Peninsular War began. No more conclusive proof of the divining power of the imagination, working under the direction of a robust moral sense, exists, is even conceivable.¹ To the student of modern history this poem is, or ought to be, invaluable; indeed, Wordsworth has on the whole been as good a friend to that often sorely-tried wayfarer as any poet that has written in English.

Before leaving this subject I must just glance at the single separate prose work of this poet that still keeps a place in men's memory. In 1808 the shock of vexation and disappointment that the news of the Convention of Cintra had produced throughout the country became in him a regulated outburst of patriotic rage, which found vent in the writing of a most impassioned pamphlet on the subject, warm with generous feeling and rich in indignant eloquence, exhibiting in every paragraph an almost fierce sympathy with the insurgent peoples, but conspicuous for the defects incident to all raids of excitable onlookers into the field of active politics—imperfect knowledge of the situation, scarcely a sense of its difficulties, and blind injustice to the men that were toiling, however mistakenly at times, to gain the ends that the writer passionately proposed and thought it possible to reach at a bound. Wordsworth, like, Southey, like Landor—both also enthusiasts for Spanish emancipation from

¹ Remarkable too is the placid flow of the composition—perhaps among the secrets of its power, setting off the spirit of the Happy Warrior by contrast with the tumult and deepening din, the uproar, the hurlyburly of war.

Napoleon and scornfully denunciatory of the statesmen then in command — like many another man of speculative genius merely, talked and wrote on such matters as one who had never read, or having read, was incapable of laying to heart, the obvious truth so forcibly expressed in Hooker's first paragraph. It is the habit of men of mere thought to be somewhat impatient with men of action when the situation is critical.

The publication and its consequences of Wordsworth's longer works now claim their due share of our attention. Even these were the products of his earlier career ; though kept still in manuscript, they were all either completed or as near completion as they were ever to be, when he came to Rydal Mount. To that house he undoubtedly carried with him *Peter Bell*, the work of 1798, the fragment of *The Recluse*, written in 1799, *The Prelude*, whose composition engaged him at intervals between 1799 and 1805, *The Waggoner*, which he wrote in 1805, *The White Doe of Rylstone*, which was the heaviest employment of 1807, and the vast bulk if not the whole of *The Excursion*, which was certainly in a finished state in the following year, 1814.

From this record we see how much bigger in bulk, as we have already seen how much greater in proportion of valuable matter, was the output of the first fifteen years than that of the thirty-six that still remained of the poet's career was to be. Why he held back these writings so long may be guessed, but has never been authoritatively explained. It may have been

a persuasion that the time was not yet ripe, that the public taste was not yet fully formed by his previous publications ; it may have been a notion that the War and Scott's verse left no room in men's minds for deep-thoughted verse like his.¹ One explanation that would not be unwelcome is forbidden us—that the poet had a lurking suspicion regarding them, a doubt that no one of them was exactly the thing, and was therefore afraid of losing the good opinion that he had gained already from the more judicious sort. For we are assured that his mind was never visited by the slightest misgiving not only regarding the merit but also regarding the substantial equality of merit of all he wrote.

He could correctly distinguish between what was good and what was not so good in the products of others ; but as to his own, as Mr. Matthew Arnold expresses it, "work altogether inferior, work quite uninspired, flat and dull, is produced by him with evident unconsciousness of its defects, and he presents it to us with the same faith and seriousness as his best work." This is doubtless true, as it certainly fits exactly into the general conception of Wordsworth's character ; but it hardly looks consistent with his

¹ Remark the promise made in the motto of the publication of 1807 and the reason for the delay implied, if not expressed in the second line :

Posterius graviore sono tibi Musa loquetur

Nostra ; dabunt cum securos mihi tempora fructus.

yet the "securos" may refer to either external or internal causes of disturbance.

having allowed so many and such bulky examples of his now admittedly second-rate work to accumulate on his hands and with his never having published *The Prelude* and *The Recluse* at all, even when his fame was highest. Had he been sure that these last were on a level with the poetry that had raised up to him so respectable a body of enthusiastic disciples, it is not likely he would have reserved them for his own enjoyment exclusively or denied himself the addition they might bring to his glory, a commodity to which he was never indifferent.

The others he published almost in the reverse order to that in which they had been written—*The Excursion* in 1814, *The White Doe of Rylstone* in 1815, *Peter Bell* in 1819, and not long after it in the same year, *The Waggoner*. Only a very few words can be spared for each of these. The first is the second third of a huge work to be entitled *The Recluse*, "On Man, on Nature and on Human Life" that he had projected many years before, and as a preparation for which—just to try whether his capacity was equal to the "great argument," and to brace his sinews for the task—he spent so much time on *The Prelude*, of which the alternative title was *The Growth of an Individual Mind*. To borrow his own words, this last was to be the Ante-Chapel to the Gothic Church that the greater work was figuratively to be. The design of *The Recluse* was one of the grandest ever conceived; but as it is impressively expounded in the poet's own verse, it would be presumptuous, irreverent and unnecessary for me also to attempt the task. Part of the exposition

is specially instructive, in relation to Wordsworth's conception of his office as a poet. The result of the publication was another heavy trial of Wordsworth's fortitude. Jeffrey at once came down upon the volume with an article in the *Edinburgh*, intended to be absolutely crushing; the exclamation, "This will never do," with which he opened the assault, is still famous; again arose the clamour and scoffing of the chorus of smaller critics; and Byron afterwards struck in with copious sneer and jeer. Jeffrey afterwards boasted that he had crushed *The Excursion*. The *Quarterly* alone had a good word for the work; but it was Lamb that spoke it. Again Wordsworth was nobly unmoved. "Let the age," he wrote to Southey, "continue to love its own darkness; I shall continue to write, with I trust the light of Heaven upon me."

What is the verdict of time on *The Excursion*? Still, I think, doubtful. The single-minded Wordsworthian of course has no doubt; to him it is the harmonious expression of wisdom and poetry, the highest wisdom and the best poetry in happy union. The disinterested lover of poetry might be disposed to say that while it deserves to live and will live, its thoroughly appreciative readers will always be a select class, a class not easily daunted by the quality of their reading. Of the rest of *The Recluse* the lately published single book is all that was ever written.

To *The White Doe of Rylstone* this general interest is attached, that in it we have a theme for the genius and manner of Scott treated by the genius and manner

of Wordsworth, who may really have chosen it on that very account—in any case it inevitably provoked a comparison with the poems of Scott. In a stanza of *Hart-leap Well* the poet gives us the unnecessary but still welcome assurance :

“The moving accident is not my trade :
To freeze the blood I have no ready arts :
'Tis my delight, alone in summer shade,
To pipe a simple song for thinking hearts.”

Now in the subject of *The White Doe*, consisting as it does of the part taken and the ruin incurred by the Yorkshire family of the Nortons in the Rising of the Northern Earls against Elizabeth, lies the very stuff that goes to the making of a poem of exciting adventure, of the type indicated in the first two lines, barely anything that lends itself to the treatment indicated in the second two. Yet Wordsworth used it for this inconsequent purpose, and with a result perfectly satisfactory to himself. “Everything,” he says, “that is attempted by the principal personages in *The White Doe* fails, so far as its object is external and substantial. So far as it is moral and spiritual, it succeeds.”

From this we may infer that he looked upon “the external and substantial” as Scott’s province, the “moral and spiritual” as his own ; and he was doubtless right. But even in the present dispensation men take delight in the world of the eye rather than in the world of the spirit, and read *Marmion* rather than *The White Doe*. Yet there is much excellent,

and not a little attractive, matter in this poem. There are a few, I think, that can read, and few, I am sure, read it with enjoyment without being the better of it.

With his next publication of a similar kind, *Peter Bell, The White Doe* is connected by a single but very strong tie ; in both the chief agency in effecting the beneficent result on which hangs the moral of the piece, is one of the lower animals. The heart of the hardened Peter is softened and his whole being eventually humanised, even Christianised, by influences of which the bearing and action of the most despised of all our domestic drudges was the most active ; the mute companion of the hapless Emily Norton is a powerful ally in her conflict with “ pain and grief,” helping her materially to win a “ triumph pure ” over both. There is little further resemblance, however ; the texture and tone of the two poems are altogether different. *Peter* was the child of much greater pains and consequently of far higher hopes ; during its twenty years of suppressed life, as a manuscript, no vigilance or care was forborne to fit it for the high destiny its author anticipated for it—that of “ filling permanently a station, however humble, in the Literature of our Country.” For a brief space it promised, or seemed to promise, to fulfil its destiny ; within a month after its first edition a second was called for. But it was a delusive appearance ; the reviewers were still implacable ; and *Peter* was not likely to abate their rage, was likely to stimulate it rather. There was an almost general outburst of mocking laughter ; it was received

with the nearest thing to a universal grin and cackle in the world of letters, critical and poetical, that there is any record of ; a third-rate writer, called Reynolds, anticipated its publication with a parody in advance, known to commentators on Shelley as *Peter Bell the First* ; a first-rate writer, Shelley, sought to cast further ridicule and contempt upon it in his notable *Peter Bell the Third*. The savage scoffing of Byron in his most notorious work is really a not unfair expression of educated sentiment on the subject at the time ; and only an overdone expression of a certain body of sentiment in our own. Nor were the poet's own friends much gratified at the publication ; some of them even had an uneasy feeling that the putting forth of such a poem as a masterpiece was an indignity offered to Poetry.

On this topic too Wordsworth is in good measure our best authority ; his own sonnet on *Peter Bell*, fashioned after a well-known model, is an accurate account of its reception by the reviewers and of its author's bearing thereupon. There was no reconciling force whatever even in that stanza, extraordinary for Wordsworth, which was afterwards struck out, but which Shelley took care to preserve, and whose disappearance the late Mr. Hutton regretted, because it is the only sparkle of real humour discoverable in his writings—

“ Is it a party in a parlour
Crammed just as they on earth were crammed,
Some sipping punch, some sipping tea,
But as you by their faces see,
All silent, and all damned ? ”

The Waggoner alone remains. This is unquestionably a pleasing composition, to me the only one of its author's longer efforts that is very near being uniformly pleasing. Its publication was due to Lamb, who had read it thirteen years before in manuscript, and whose unerring critical insight had penetrated its beauty of design and execution.

It ought to be specially dear to all lovers of the road from Rydal to Keswick — who of course will take special care to include the parts then in universal, but not now in general, use—and to all lovers of horses also—the mutual good understanding and entire sympathy between soft-hearted Benjamin and his team making a most winning feature of the work, and adding pathos to its close.

The volume of Wordsworth's verse was considerably increased in subsequent years—for he laboured steadily in his vocation till his seventy-seventh year—the volume of his poetry only inconsiderably. His wisdom was not altogether that of those “who soar but never roam”; he was an indefatigable tourist; and much the larger portion of his yet unconsidered work is made up of Memorials of tours—two in Scotland, one in Ireland—though *its* memorial matter is but scanty—several upon the Continent, some even in England, one at least in his own monastery.

Both the Scottish tours have added to his specially rememberable achievement, the first, which was made in 1814, his *Yarrow Visited*, no unworthy successor to the greater poem — the greatest of the kind; the second — which was made in 1831

— his *Yarrow Revisited*,¹ and sonnet on Scott's departure for Naples. The poetic power in both of these is of a good, but not quite of the best quality ; the pathetic interest unrivalled. Wordsworth had gone with his daughter Dora to Abbotsford to see his old friend, now drifting but too surely to the wreck he reached a year later, before he left for Italy ; and the brain-worn veterans went off together to visit once more the stream so dear to them, so dear to their lovers. And to their lovers' imagination their figures still stand side by side above that stream, and always will stand on the spot there where the older has placed them.

“ Once more, by Newark's Castle-gate,
Long left without a warder,
I stood, looked, listened, and with Thee,
Great Minstrel of the Border.”

In 1814 he gave perhaps the only proof of versatile power perceptible in his long career, by composing *Laodamia* and *Dion*. He wanted to show that he could be classical if he pleased ; and having caught something

¹ Both visits referred to in the *Extempore Effusion* upon the death of James Hogg.

When first descending from the moorlands
I saw the stream of Yarrow glide
Along a bare and open valley,
The Ettrick Shepherd was my guide.
When last along its banks I wandered
Through groves that had begun to shed
Their golden leaves upon the pathways,
My steps the Border-minstrel led.

of the proper spirit from the reading of the classics with his elder son, was moved thereby to the production of these two admirable pieces. He was particularly proud of *Laodamia*; and being well-endowed with that self-satisfaction which seems an essential condition of the serenest earthly happiness, announced his opinion with absolute unreserve—that “*Lycidas* and *Laodamia* were twin immortals”; these are his very words. *Laodamia* is certainly a favourite with nearly every order of reader; even its sermonising tone in places has not spoiled it for any—though one passage drew down upon itself the angry rebuke of Landor and was altered by its author accordingly. Even long afterwards the Wordsworth of the golden prime would occasionally reappear, if but briefly and after long intervals; the second song *To the Skylark* was written in 1825, the soft-paced soothing sonnet, “Most sweet it is, with unuplifted eyes” as late as 1833. And these are only examples; no great diligence or marked laxity in choosing is needed to multiply them considerably.

One whole section of his later poems calls for special remark, if not for their merit, at least for their significance. *The Ecclesiastical Sonnets* are not yet—perhaps never will be—in much esteem; indeed, one school of criticism regards them as the most wooden compositions that ever brought discredit on genius. But Mr. Arnold was able to read the whole series—and there are 132 of them—with pleasure and edification; and it seems to me an indiscriminating and therefore unworthy criticism to comprehend them all in a sweeping censure. The former of the two on

King's College Chapel, if not the latter also, ought to have checked the headlong impulse to condemn them in the lump. There is an insufficient share of beauty perhaps among them, but certainly not a "*plentiful* lack" of power. It is in any case but bare justice to Wordsworth to reflect, that if the greater number be inglorious as poems, some of them have the rarer merit of being virtual prophecies that Time has verified. Prompted merely by the part he took in the building of Rydal Chapel and by some conversations on ecclesiastical history with Sir George Beaumont, and written without any special study of the subject, in several instances they assumed, seemingly by the mere operation of the imaginative instinct, a forward looking character and spirit, a tone far more in harmony with a then unsuspected future, with a now prevalent sentiment on such subjects, than with that of their own time—indeed, they gave serious offence even to their writer's friends *at* their own time. Written as early as 1821, six years before the publication of the *Christian Year*, twelve before the beginning of the Oxford Movement, several of them are charged with the spirit and temper of that now wide-working and still expanding movement in the English Church and without it. Keats reckoned Wordsworth among the "great spirits" that would "give the world another heart and other pulses." Such a fulfilment of his prediction as this was certainly not among Keats's expectations ; but the prophecies as well as the prayers of men are not seldom fulfilled in a form they look not for, nor would desire. The sonnet on Laud and its

author's note thereupon are alone nearly sufficient to establish my position.

Wordsworth's last effort—and an effort in the literal sense it must have been—was the Ode on the Installation of Prince Albert as Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, an event that took place in 1847. Its one distinction—besides being the last thing he wrote—is indicated by its exclusion from every subsequent edition of his works, though it was published for the occasion. It provokes a comparison, which soon proves a mortifying contrast, with Gray's Ode on a similar occasion, which was also a last work. The contrast may not be entirely due to the varying constitutions of genius, for Gray was only fifty-three, while Wordsworth was seventy-seven, at the respective dates. And when struggling through *his* ode, Wordsworth was watching and waiting without a ray of hope for the fall of the heaviest blow that ever befell him, the death of his only daughter, Dora. She is the only one of his children that lived into maturity who still lives in her father's verse; this brings before us—as it had already done in her mother's case—three points of her life—as a “monthling”—it is the father's own word—in the “Hast thou then survived, Mild Offspring of Infirm Humanity,” in the address to Dora, now twelve years old, written under apprehension of becoming blind and thus needing his daughter's guiding hand, and in *The Triad*, written when she was twenty-four, in which she is mated with Edith Southey and Sara Coleridge—all three being graces—in a sense, perhaps the best sense. In 1841 Dora was married

in Bath to Mr. Edward Quillinan, a Roman Catholic gentleman, an ex-Guardsman who had come to Rydal twenty years before to have the privilege of living near Wordsworth and his family, had lost his first wife there shortly afterwards, but still continued the poet's neighbour and intimate friend. His memory and the character of his life are preserved in Matthew Arnold's *Elegy upon him* with its touching, if hardly grammatical, close.

“Alive, we would have changed thy lot,
We would not change it now.”

For Quillinan had suffered much. His second wife died in July, 1847—after a long illness. In less than three years—on St. George's Day, 1850—her illustrious father followed, and four days later was laid beside her in Grasmere Churchyard. In January, 1855, the constant, self-effacing Dorothy, who had been an almost helpless invalid for thirty years, and in January, 1859, the sister, wife and mother they all loved so well, joined them. In that scanty plot of ground may be seen “the graves of a household,” not easily matched, even in England.

Wordsworth

IV.

A FEW supplementary words, dealing with Wordsworth's characteristics as a man and as a poet, seem to me hardly avoidable. But they must be few.

Temperament necessarily tells more powerfully in the sphere of poetry than in any of the other intellectual spheres, tells too in proportion to the genuineness and originality of the poet ; the varieties of excellence found in excellent poetical production are mainly due to the varying temperaments of the producers ; poetry is largely an affair of temperament. Now I take it that the two most telling constituents of Wordsworth's temperament were his love of rambling and his love of simple and humble life ; his birth gave him and his breeding stimulated in him the first, early circumstances engendered and his native constancy maintained inviolate the second. "Wandering," he tells us himself, "was my passion . . . had I been born in a class which would have deprived me of what is called a liberal education, it is not unlikely that, being strong in body, I should have taken to a way of life such as that in which my Pedlar"—the Wanderer of *The Excursion*—"passed the greater part of his days." The Wanderer's character "is chiefly

an idea of what I fancied my own character might have become in his circumstances." And the stamp of the other is on the bulk of his work throughout, the longest and shortest poem alike, though graven deepest perhaps in *The Old Cumberland Beggar*, which is therefore its most striking illustration. *Peter Bell* is a strong demonstration of both. And Wordsworth's life and poetry can never be divorced in our thoughts ; indeed, they were but different expressions of the same force ; the two facts that gave colour and flavour as well as the vital element to his verse gave all three to his life also—the facts, that he was a reclaimed, but imperfectly reclaimed, rover, almost vagabond, and that, amid the available opulences of Allan Bank and Rydal Mount he was in spirit a cottager—yet a gentle, liberally educated cottager, almost peasant, was in fact his own Shepherd Lord, like whom—

“ Love had he found in huts where poor men lie ;
His only tutors had been woods and rills,
The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lonely hills.”

Of no other poet that ever lived could it be said that his legs had carried him, ere he arrived at old age, over 175,000 to 180,000 English miles—and this De Quincey says of Wordsworth ; or that he had made it his first object to set—

“ Clear images before your gladdened eyes
Of Nature's unambitious underwood
And flowers that prosper in the shade ; ”

and this Wordsworth says, virtually of himself.

Moreover his fellow-feeling with the poor made him a most indulgent judge of their occasional lapses into offences against morality or law ; here and here only his stern integrity relaxed ; if only the offender were connected with or showed any sensibility to the power of mountains, woods or fields, the spirit of censure almost died within him. This generalising effect of the presence of the rustic element in the questionable is conspicuous in *The Two Thieves*, and *The Farmer of Tilsbury Vale* ; and the relenting towards picturesque lawlessness, the incapacity to find it in his heart to be severe with the *mountaineer's* delinquencies, thieveries and such-like, is seen plainly enough in *Rob Roy's Grave*. This last is a most instructive composition, laying bare as it does for the moment the temper and impulses, buried, but buried alive, deep in its author's nature ; strongly and effectively curbed indeed by the magnificent moral force of the man, but working and heaving at times like Enceladus under Etna. And the Toryism of his mature years had an appreciable dash of this inheritance from the earlier ; it was robust certainly, but for all that, he could say to Crabb Robinson, " I have a great deal of the Chartist in me " ; and could also, as we have lately learned from Mr. Knight's Preface, kick a breach in a new wall, raised by a noble lord, that blocked a right of way near Ullswater, and at Lord Lonsdale's table bluntly tell the same noble lord what he thought of his conduct—though I dissent altogether from the statement that this proves that there was a great deal of the Radical under Wordsworth's Conservatism. To dip,

just for once, a political phrase in an element that can consecrate even a political phrase—the element of poetry—we might say that Wordsworth was the first—yet not perhaps the last—democratic Tory. His works, taken in their sum, tell the tale of an ingrained Conservatism, and an inborn, ineradicable love of the common people.

That he had one at least of the inbred qualities of the best type of homely Englishman may be curiously, even amusingly, shown in the following way. No reminiscence of him has been so often repeated, each time as something entirely new, than his assurance that “he used to be frequently so rapt into an unreal transcendental world of ideas that the external world seemed no longer to exist in relation to him, and he had to reconvince himself of its existence by clasping a tree or something that happened to be near him.” And this experience was the prompter of, and explains, the dark passage in the Great Ode which speaks of “those obstinate questionings Of sense and outward things”—and the rest. Now these absorptions into the invisible were not infrequent in later life also, and taking place at times behind the locked door of his study, kept the porridge cooking and the rest of the family waiting despite repeated efforts to recall him to those—not so very stern—realities of the outer world. One method, however, which sometimes had to be employed in the last resort, invariably succeeded—and at once—the breaking of a plate just outside his door ; this was a “falling from him, vanishing,” that never failed to redress the situation and revive the

consciousness of a material world. For there were no affectations about Wordsworth ; he let everybody see him exactly as he was. Possibly he thought there was no possible better than that. His frank admiration of his own work, his entire, never concealed, occasionally expressed, conviction that he stood, and would always stand, with the first masters of English song—with Shakespeare and Milton—has provoked censure, even laughter ; but scarcely deserves either. It was merely his honesty ; the irrepressible outcome of pure guilelessness.

But it is a remarkable fact that he should have regarded himself as the one supreme spiritual power of his time ; such a belief was substantially announced by his bearing and implied in his words whenever intellectual gifts and the measure thereof were the subject of conversation—and these were, perhaps for that reason, a subject he liked to talk about. Carlyle once got him on the subject of great poets, but found him much more alive to their limitations than their strength. Pope, Milton, Burns all turned out to be limited inferior creatures ; “even Shakespeare himself had his limitations, his blind sides ; gradually it became apparent to me that of transcendent unlimited there was, to this critic, probably but one specimen known, Wordsworth himself.” Now here we have the very worst that could be said of Wordsworth ; is it so very bad ? With all his self-conceit and parsimony he was a kindly mortal, large-hearted too in certain connections. Of these none is more notable than that with Hartley Coleridge ; his patient and

forbearing fatherliness towards that hopelessly lost but most loveable and universally loved sinner melted even Miss Martineau's censorious temper towards him into soft admiration ; she confesses herself touched with a feeling of tenderness before the bowed figure of the grey-haired poet standing over the open grave of the self-ruined genius whom, through a quarter of a century, he had, with the inexhaustible devotion of a woman, vainly striven to save. What are a man's vanities, what his other foibles, before the mute speech of poor Hartley's grave, placed among those of the Wordsworths in response to his own eager longing to be even posthumously adopted into the family that had been so good to him in life ?

Coming next to Wordsworth as a poet I am tempted at the outset to make a passage from Cowley's Essay on Agriculture—which is both a choice morsel of prose, and in several ways suggestive of Wordsworth—the text of my brief discourse. With a liberal interpretation of a single word, it expresses much of the conception of his place in poetry formed by his advanced disciples and a familiar fact of his life as well. It is of Virgil that Cowley is speaking. “God made him one of the best philosophers and best husbandmen ; and to adorn and communicate both these faculties, the best poet : he made him, besides all this, a rich man, and a man who desired to be no richer. . . . To be a husbandman is but a retreat from the city ; to be a philosopher, from the world ; or rather a retreat from the world, as it is man's, into the world, as it is God's.”

On the first of the claims asserted for Wordsworth, that his works contain a profound, true and noble system of philosophy, I forbear to speak, mainly from a sense of insufficiency, the subject being exceedingly difficult, the ground still debateable and debated. I can honestly do no more than avow that here Mr. Arnold's judgement, who is on this point a dissenter from the strict Wordsworthian creed, fully satisfies me ; were I to express my own belief, I could only echo Mr. Arnold's language. To the part, then, of Mr. Arnold's Preface to his volume of Selections that discusses this claim I commend you, and to the paper of Mr. Leslie Stephen which he is there combating, as also to that of Mr. Knight, the chief living apostle of the Faith. Its adherents are few, though exceeding zealous ; and they do not seem to be making converts. But regarding the moral power of much of Wordsworth's verse there is—there surely can be—little controversy, its presence and energy are practically undisputed. And the moral power of *poetry* is immeasurably greater than that of argumentation or didactic prose, inasmuch as that goes straight upon the emotional element in our nature, and when in its most effective form, seizes and bears us along towards *its* end with irresistible strength. And seldom has the moral principle arrayed itself in such beauty, and consequently in such might, as in the verse of Wordsworth. In a sense, the whole of Wordsworth's verse has a moral purpose ; its design throughout is upon the spirit—to reinforce the spirit with something that it will be glad of, whereby the sum of human happiness, and therefore the sum of human

goodness, will be increased. For he wrote throughout as if it were a principle with him as it was with Landor, who enunciates it, that "Goodness does not more certainly make men happy than happiness makes them good." In a more definite sense, however, the element is found concentrated in a poem, a passage of a poem, a single line or couple of lines. The *Ode to Duty* and *Resolution and Independence* are unqualified examples of the first; stanzas of *Laodamia*, the last stanza of the first *Ode to the Skylark* and the last stanza of *Hart-leap Well* will sufficiently illustrate the second; and a few drawn from the teeming supplies of the third are such lines as:

"Hope and a renovation without end."

"The appropriate calm of blest eternity."

"They are of the sky,
And from our earthly memory fade away."

"His heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay."

"High Heaven rejects the lore
Of nicely-calculated less or more."

and

"We live by Admiration, Hope and Love."

Not that a distinct truth of the required moral calibre need be found in the utterance; if there be in it the virtue, proved by the effect on ourselves, to enkindle good impulses and feed these when enkindled, whatever be the secret of this virtue, felicity or melody of expression; if it has the trick of bringing us in contact

with the great fount of spiritual power, it is itself a moral power.

But it is in neither the philosophical nor definite moral province that Wordsworth has laid the foundations of his immortality. His special service has been done, his peculiar bounty has been shown, to his fellow-men in another field, that of pure, natural, spontaneous poetry, bubbling up as it were, clean, sparkling, unforced, straight from the fountain-head, from the very centre of Nature's hidden springs. It is in these outpourings of Nature's own heart that Wordsworth is unexampled, inimitable, unapproachable. This is the "orient liquor" that he presents to us in his crystal glass, poetry in its sheer essence, undiluted, unqualified—draughts of the purest pleasure to the kindred spirit—to him alone among the sons of men has it been given to draw such straight from their native source.

In this class of his compositions he is not merely the confidant but the voice itself of Nature ; Nature speaks through him. In Mr. Arnold's words, " Nature herself seems to take the pen out of his hand, and to write for him with her own bare, sheer, penetrating power." His other glories, held more substantial and enduring by himself, may fade away ; this one never can. To the lover of poetry for its own sake, the real, the great, the unique, the immortal Wordsworth is the poet of his own *Poet's Epitaph*, that just and delicate ideal of his yet unrealised self which he painted at Goslar. Further on this topic I need not speak ; the proofs of the assertion lie scattered through the previous

lectures ; Mr. Arnold's Preface and Mr. Shairp's essay contain eloquent expositions of it.

Much, perhaps most, of what I have hitherto sought to say in this lecture is forcibly summarised by Keble in his dedication of his lectures on Poetry to its subject, and may thus receive confirmation from a weighty name. To him—I am trying to translate a part of Mr. Keble's Latin ¹—"Highest God vouchsafed that gift, that, whether he sang of the feelings of men or of the beauty of earth and sky, he should always raise the minds of his readers to holier things, always should stand on the side of the poor and more simple." Of this the "raise to holier things" was especially grateful to Wordsworth ; his nephew tells us that he "regarded it as a very happy delineation of what he, as a poet, had endeavoured to perform."

In conclusion, we may say of Wordsworth that he fulfilled in amplest measure three at least of the ends for which God, according to Milton, bestows the gift of song—"he inbreeds and cherishes in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility ; he allays the perturbations of the mind ; and he sets the affections in right tune." As another says, "No voice like his

¹ Viro vere Philosopho
Et vati sacro
Gulielmo Wordsworth
Cui illud munus tribuit
Deus Opt. Max.

Ut, sive Hominum affectus caneret,
Sive Terrarum et Cœli Pulchritudinem,
Legentium Animos Semper ad Sanctiora Erigeret,—
Semper a Pauperum et Simpliciorum Partibus Staret.

to soothe and bless." Commending you to this benediction, and to Mr. Matthew Arnold's and Mr. Palgrave's Memorial verses, both of which are no less true than they are moving, I close—close with regret—the subject of Wordsworth.

FRANCIS BACON

HIS PUBLIC CAREER AND PERSONAL CHARACTER

A Lecture by James Rowley

The Public Career and Personal Character of Francis Bacon¹

THE task I have undertaken, though far from being an easy one even to men whose knowledge and capacity greatly exceed mine, has yet two conspicuous advantages : its limits are marked with tolerable distinctness, and the area those limits enclose is not too wide to be fairly taken in by any mind of average capacity. It is true that to most the mere mention of the name " Lord Bacon " suggests a field of intellectual labour that stretches far beyond the horizon of all ordinary, and of most extraordinary, observers ; but that is because those that think and talk about Lord Bacon generally think and talk about the writer of the *Novum Organum* and *History of Henry VII*, not about the Learned Counsel, the Attorney-General, the Lord Chancellor ; and luckily for me my business at present is exclusively with the latter. Not only too is the range of my subject distinctly limited, but also the facts it deals with have been fairly ascertained—thanks to Bacon's own care in preserving the letters and other documents that reveal or illustrate his actions, and to the loving diligence of a succession of scholars—of whom Mr. James Spedding is the latest, fullest, and worthiest—the most eventful passages of his life

¹ We are not able to give the date of this lecture, which was probably suggested by Spedding's *Works, Life and Letters of Bacon* (2 vols., 1878).

have been laid bare to the satisfaction of rational curiosity. There is not much dispute about what Bacon actually said and did on the occasions which supply the most abundant matter for controversy ; it is almost invariably on the right interpretation of his sayings and doings that the disputants join issue. Bacon's apologists do not deny that he had been nobly befriended by the man against whose life he pleaded in court ; that he watched—so far as we know, without flinching—the agonies of a half-crazy parson, in an unpreached sermon of whose the King professed that he saw most dangerous treason ; that he allowed the reigning favourite to write him letters desiring him as Chancellor to show all the favour he might to particular suitors ; that he took presents from parties to causes in his court whose cases were still undecided ; and that he was active in many of the transactions that the historians of James's reign have visited with emphatic reprobation ; but they maintain that in most of these alleged misdeeds Bacon was justified by their circumstances or by the practice of the time, and in the remainder that his sin was not of so dark a hue as not to be easily forgiven by fellow sinners. Even over the minor details of his actions there is little wrangling.

Now the proper method of treating this subject—especially in a lecture, which from its very nature must be brief—seems to be, to fix the attention solely on Bacon as a lawyer and statesman, forgetting for the moment that he was ever anything else. If we do not carefully separate the Chancellor from the Philosopher, or rather—to take a hint from the poet

Cowley—contemplate the Chancellor of King James's laws apart from the Chancellor of Nature's laws, do not succeed in *isolating* the former, we shall be sure to go astray. Bacon chose to cast in his lot with the Cecils, Howards, and Egertons of the day, and as a Cecil, a Howard or an Egerton he must consent to be judged. In his will "he leaves his name and memory to men's charitable speeches, and to foreign nations, and to the next ages." But every one whom fortune or his own energy has lifted into high place does pretty much the same, though he may not often say as much. One, however, cannot help suspecting that the spoken appeal of the Author of the *Essays* and *Advancement of Learning* has been more potent with the dispensers of posthumous justice than the dumb appeal of his unlettered brethren. Literature has taken charge of all alike ; and literary men are not the "kinless loons" that Cromwell's Scottish judges were ; the justice they deal out to historical characters of their own craft is more generously tempered with mercy than that which they deal out to those whose kinship they do not acknowledge. In this there is nothing to be surprised at, and little to blame ; working in the full sunlight of a grand intellectual reputation, literature can hardly help being dazzled. But at present our course is clear ; strictly speaking, it is not Francis Bacon, but Viscount St. Albans that comes before us to-night.

Yet, comparatively narrow as our field is thus made, there is in it, as experience has shown, ample scope for criticism and controversy. Bacon's public

career has provoked a good deal of both ; of the latter something more than its fair share. For the criticism I make no apology. The subject demands it ; I must only take care that it be as just as my knowledge, insight, and critical gift permit. Being resolute to keep my feet from straying into the limitless empire of Bacon's intellectual sovereignty, I run no risk, I hope, of being compared to a pygmy perched on the shoulder of a giant trying to make a critical estimate of his skull, or a natural philosopher holding up a candle in the noon-day glare to enable his class to see more distinctly what a radiant thing the sun is. The controversy, too, however impatient we may get under it, has yet a solid basis in the nature of things. Every candid mind resents unlimited literary whitewashing, and has some ado to resist the reactionary feeling excited by being forced to watch such a process. But the impulse that drives on the excessive zeal of literary partisanship is very natural, sometimes even generous, now and then almost noble. Great intellects are the flower, "the supreme essence and outcome" of humanity ; in them men see the highest height they can ever hope to reach in this world. Whatever exalts or ennobles these great intellects exalts or ennobles mankind, and gives men a better opinion of themselves ; whatever lowers or debases these lowers or debases mankind, and humiliates men in their own estimation. If Bacon prove heartless, Dryden unprincipled, Swift unfeeling, Johnson brutal, and Wordsworth selfish, the dignity of manhood is impaired, humanity is so much the poorer. If each, or any of

these men, can be shown to be guiltless of the charge alleged against him, the dignity of manhood is vindicated, humanity is so much the richer. This, I fancy, is the secret feeling that prompts literature to take such an infinity of trouble to justify Bacon in his treatment of Essex, and Dryden in his desertion to the religion of the Court, while it regards with indifference, or dismisses with a sneer, the judicial violence of Coke and the *ex-officio* apostasy of Sunderland. The motive is honourable; men would fain have their highest attainable moral level as high as their highest attainable intellectual, are ill at ease when those who reach the one fall short of the other, and are proportionately gratified when they see a Milton, a Newton, a Burke, or a Ruskin reach both. All honour, then, to Mr. Spedding, who has toiled heroically to give back Francis Bacon to mankind, to show men that they need not blush for their foremost intellect in these later days.

Bacon's public career stretches over thirty-seven years. He sat in every Parliament—nine in all—that was called between his twenty-fourth and sixty-first year, being a member of the Commons' House in all but the last, in the last being for a time not only a member of the Lords' House, but in a certain sense its leading member. There is no special distinction about his parliamentary career, though constituencies and fellow-members seem to have been sensible of his fine qualities. Middlesex chose him to one Parliament, Cambridge University to another, the latter carrying him off from Ipswich and St. Albans,

which had also elected him. But the time had not yet come when men could rise to what Bacon seems to have sought after, power, honours and wealth, by the parliamentary ladder alone ; and Bacon, though not undistinguished, cannot be said to have shone as a Parliament-man. The day for shining in Parliament had, however, not yet dawned. His name is found in the debates from the very first, appears with increasing frequency in every successive Parliament or session of Parliament, and is now and then conspicuous in originating, supporting, or pushing forward important measures. There are two or three noticeable things about his notions and behaviour in the Commons and the sentiments of the other members regarding him. He had a somewhat higher conception of the Parliamentary functions than prevailed in the sixteenth century. Thinking it unworthy of a great nation that its representatives should be called together merely to vote money to the Crown, he not only strove to give the appearance of a more dignified purpose and a loftier tone to the debates, but also did somewhat to take away their reproach by introducing several measures of public utility himself. One of these, for the repeal of superfluous laws, on which he tried to awaken some degree of interest in Elizabeth's last Parliament, is notable as showing Bacon's forecast of a monstrous abuse, and attempted anticipation of a great reform of modern times. Even in speaking on a subsidy Bill—a not very inspiring subject—he is seen endeavouring to pitch the note of the discussion a little higher than honourable gentlemen

were accustomed to, and to stir up within the Commons some sense of their own dignity.

It is also honourable to Bacon that the Commons appear to have had a large measure of faith in his capacity, honesty, and discretion. He was their favourite—in his mature days perhaps their invariable—Reporter of Committees, as the Chairman was then called, and of Conferences with the King or the Lords ; and so entirely did the Commons trust him that they more than once put him at the head of Committees charged to carry out objects that he had strongly opposed. Many proofs of this unlimited confidence in his punctual fulfilment of a trust are found in those stirring passages of parliamentary history connected with the Impositions, Purveyance, and other grievances over which James' first Parliament was so fretful. For part of this time Bacon was Solicitor or Attorney-General, and took the side of the Crown on every disputed question with a promptitude and adhered to it with a steadiness that have drawn down on him the scorn of some modern writers ; yet the House would have *him* and no other as the leading Member of Committees appointed to search for precedents, argue before the Lords, or address the King, in favour of opinions that were the reverse of his own. And in no single instance did the House show the slightest dissatisfaction with him ; in the only one in which his conduct seemed open to exception, "the acclamation of the House was"—these are the very words of the Report, that the course "Bacon had taken on the spur of the moment in the King's

presence was a testimony of their duty and no levity." Mr. Spedding clearly has excellent grounds for his opinion that the Commons found Bacon to be the man among them in whose hands "any business of delicacy or difficulty always prospered best."

And in the parliamentary element Bacon's bearing was self-possessed, dignified and manly. So far as we know Parliament never heard an intemperate word fall from his lips ; though his opinions were often ill-received by the majority, in the most exciting debates he maintained an unruffled serenity ; he seems to have never once forgotten himself when upholding unpopular views. For after the great Queen's death the temper of the Commons changed ; the premonitory symptoms, though none understood them, of a great revolution began to show themselves ; the House not seldom betrayed a disposition to fall into an ungovernable mood without precedent in Elizabethan Parliaments. This was a new experience to Bacon. He had hitherto striven to raise Parliament out of the region of humdrum, but had never dreamed of its asserting a position in the State injurious to the prerogative of the Crown. A state of things in which the Commons should be supreme would have been to him a revelation of political chaos, a confusion worse confounded. To Bacon the idea that the affairs of a great nation should be controlled, and its policy dictated, by a miscellaneous collection of country gentlemen, lawyers, and merchants would have been ridiculous. Accordingly from the beginning of the seventeenth century Bacon held stedfastly to the

Crown. He took the same side as King James on every public question, was diligent in seeking arguments in favour of every pet scheme of the King's, pushed himself into the front of the King's partisans in every dispute, in a word placed his reasoning and persuading powers absolutely at the King's disposal. It would not be easy to find a trace of a difference of opinion between the King and Bacon during the first fourteen years of Stuart rule.

For all that it is not necessary to pronounce Bacon a servile tool of tyranny, though some have not scrupled to do so. It is easy to point out the close association between Bacon's worldly interests and the course he pursued, and to hint that like many philosophical politicians he had a turn for swimming with the stream. It is true that during a part of this time Bacon was hungry for office, during another part actually in office, the paid servant of the Crown ; but there is nothing to show that the opinions he expressed were not the opinions he held. We may have our suspicions, may be eager to find indications that the motives ascribed to him did not operate ; but we can confidently assert that in Bacon's parliamentary career there is nothing to fix a dishonourable stain on his name. If he went with the Crown now, whereas he had once shown another inclination, the circumstances were altered. Instead of lying in stagnation Parliament was now instinct with life. Bacon had now little reason to fear that the Lower House would settle down into a mere political mechanism for increasing the royal revenue. His apprehension may now have been that it would show

too great activity and advance pretensions irreconcilable with order and good government, and Mr. Spedding actually credits him with such an apprehension ; and Bacon, whose longing for good government was undoubtedly a genuine feeling, may have been convinced that with the Crown only lay the possibility of giving the nation that one priceless blessing. For this is the theory on which his champions rest their vindication of his conduct in attaching himself to the Court. What his eyes desired to see above all things was the establishment of national principles and sound methods of government ; there was but one means of securing this, he thought, the royal prerogative, and so he was ready to defend the royal prerogative against all attacks. Unless I am much mistaken in my reading of Bacon's political career, this is a well-founded theory ; it seems to me to rhyme accurately with everything we know of his sayings and doings as a political thinker, a parliamentary speaker, and a Minister of State. If this be so, there is little to object to in Bacon's conduct as a parliament-man. The case against him would have little plausibility if it drew its materials from this province of his life alone.

But the far more active sphere of Bacon's political labours lay outside Parliament, and to it belong those parts of Bacon's conduct over which historians and moralists have shaken their heads, and regarding which thoroughly informed critics are not yet agreed as to their verdict. Into this sphere Bacon did not find admission so easy as into Parliament. He had to wait for nearly a quarter of a century and to

sit in seven Parliaments, before he was appointed to any office under the Crown, or was even given any permanent public employment. Why he was kept in the antechamber so long has never been satisfactorily explained. His transcendent ability seems to have been admitted from the first; his father, who had been for twenty-one years among the most faithful and valued of Elizabeth's ministers, had designed and partly trained him for the service of the Queen; he was himself more than willing to be dedicated to the same service; the man highest in the confidence of the sovereign was his close connexion, for some years the young noble whom the Queen delighted to honour was his enthusiastic friend and vehement advocate; for a time the royal ear was open to his own pleadings; one could hardly conceive an aspirant with greater advantages, internal and external, better gifted or better circumstanced. Yet, though a seeker as early as 1580, he was not a finder of what he sought until 1607, when he was made Solicitor-General. He had certainly been before this one of the Learned Counsel to both Elizabeth and James; and an occasional bit of employment had been thrown him, in which he did his part so well that it is surprising he did not get more. It would have been well for his fame, however, had he been passed over in one too notorious case; his appearance in court against his benefactor, Essex, and his acceptance of £1,200—about £6,000 now—the fine of one of Essex's less unlucky associates, still make a dark blot on his memory, which, to my mind, no amount of apologetic literature will ever wholly wash

away. The fact remains that the greatest intellect of his time was kept shivering in the shade for two-thirds of his working life.

Some think that the Cecils, father and son, looked with a jealous eye on their young kinsman, and seeing in him a possible obstacle to their own designs, craftily poisoned their mistress's mind against him. For this notion there is nothing that can be called evidence—unless the fact that Bacon and his mother were at one time strongly suspicious of the younger Cecil—and with Lady Bacon, at least, suspicions were certainties—is to be taken as such. The elder Cecil gave him the reversion of the Clerkship of the Star Chamber, a post worth £1,600 a year, equal to £8,000 now; to the younger, Bacon is almost passionate in protesting his devotion. "I do protest before God," he once wrote to Robert Cecil, "without compliment or any light vein of mind, if I knew in what course of life to do you best service, I would take it, and make my thoughts that now fly to many pieces, be reduced to that centre." I am nearly sure that the tardiness in Bacon's upward progress was not due to any active ill-will on the part of the Cecils.

Some think that the deep offence that Bacon gave the Queen by his unexpected display of spirit in the Parliament of 1593, when he helped to spoil an ingenious plan for entrapping the Commons into an acknowledgment of a co-ordinate power in the Lords over money bills, thrust him back from the door at a critical moment. There is no doubt that the Queen was greatly displeased on this occasion, and denied

the offender admission to her presence for a considerable time. Yet patience and prudent management brought back the Queen's favour, but did *not* bring the preferment his soul longed for. Elizabeth died, and all that Bacon gained from the new King was a pension of £60 a year, security in his position of Learned Counsel, and the cheap honour of Knighthood ; more than four years had yet to pass before the coveted Solicitorship was given him.

It might be thought that Bacon was unfortunate in his choice of a profession. That a man whom so fastidious a critic as Joubert decides to have been "a grand and noble intellect," and who was fully alive to his own powers, should have elected to win his way to wealth and learned leisure through

" That codeless myriad of precedent,
That wilderness of single instances,"

called the law of England, is not exactly what we should have expected. Bacon wrangling with Coke about the reseizure of the lands of a relapsed recusant ! Cutting blocks with a razor is a most inexpressive image of such a proceeding ; a Beethoven or a Wagner grinding Yankee Doodle on a barrel organ daily from morning to evening would be more like the thing. But it was only when all other avenues were apparently closed against him that Bacon took seriously to practising the law.

Perhaps the true reason of Bacon's being kept waiting so long lies nearer the surface. May it not have been that both Elizabeth and James were unwilling

to take him into their service because they thought him unfit for it? The most excellent of Elizabeth's many royal excellences, historians tell us, was a keen insight into character and a readiness to be served by available merit, wherever found; it is well-nigh inconceivable that she would have declined to employ Bacon, had she been assured that to employ him would have been for her advantage and the nation's. And James simply picked up the reins as they had fallen from Elizabeth's hands; the early part of his reign was merely a continuance of his predecessor's so far as the change of charioteers allowed. It is not unlikely—there are not a few touches in Bacon's biography that suggest it—that Bacon was regarded at Court rather as a thinker than as a man of action, a speculative dreamer rather than an efficient worker.

Now the Clerkship of the Star Chamber was just the place for such a man; its income, managed with ordinary prudence, would have given him abundant leisure to dream on things to come and to build up Great Instaurations to his heart's content. And if Mr. Mill, the man in possession (*Beati possidentes*), had no sense of his responsibilities and kept Bacon out of the place for nineteen years by living unconscionably long, that was not Elizabeth's fault or Burghley's. Now and then Bacon himself betrays a consciousness of unfitness for the work he was so eager to undertake. Writing to Bodley in 1606 he says: "I do confess, since I was of any understanding my mind hath in effect been absent from that I have done; and in absence are many errors that I willingly acknowledge; and amongst the

rest this great one that led the rest, that knowing myself by inward calling to be fitter to hold a book than play a part I have led my life in civil causes for which I was not very fit by nature and more unfit by the pre-occupation of my mind." Too much significance, however, may easily be given to words like these ; so much depends on the humour a man is in when he writes them. Other passages may be found in Bacon's letters and papers that speak a different language.

One thing, however, is clear, if Bacon failed to win preferment in early life, it was not through any excess of modesty or backwardness in asking. There is no blinking the fact, Bacon was a sturdy beggar all his life. He prayed, and never fainted ; he kept steadily knocking at the doors of office ; no disappointment disheartened him, no rebuff daunted him ; it would be curious to calculate what proportion of his extant letters thank for past, or solicit future, favours or support. The result of such a calculation would, I am afraid, be humiliating to the order of beings of whom Bacon was the highest type—in the language of the latest religious sect—the cosmically-emotional school of thought, the most organic of organisms. Almost his first letter that has survived, one to his uncle, Burghley, had "no further errand but to commend to your Lordship, the remembrance of my suit which then I moved unto you" ; almost the last entreats Sir Humphrey May "to sound the Duke of Buckingham's good affection towards me before you do move him in the particular petition." And the forty-five years of Bacon's

life that lie between these two letters are of a piece with such a beginning and ending. His first suit, which lasted for some seven years, fairly over ; no practice coming, and Mr. Mill, the Star Chamber obstructive, insensible to his clear duty ; in his thirty-third year Bacon, briefless barrister as he was, addressed himself to the task of winning the vacant Attorney-Generalship.

His rival was Edward Coke, the great Common Lawyer ; but Coke's massive legal knowledge was, Bacon thought, as an advantage, more than counterbalanced by the warm friendship the Queen's favourite, Essex, felt for himself. Essex certainly did his part nobly ; he made his friend's case more than his own, spending, as he said, "his utmost friendship, credit, and authority" in promoting Bacon's suit, and during fourteen months of hot strife never letting slip an opportunity of pressing Bacon's claim, and "driving in a nail for the negative of the Huddler," as Bacon phrases it in one of his letters, "Huddler" being Coke's nickname with Bacon and Essex. It was all lost labour, however ; the Huddler got the place. But his appointment left the Solicitorship vacant ; and a fight began for the Solicitorship, which was kept up for eighteen months with an almost passionate, certainly injudicious, pertinacity on Essex's part. Essex's letters to Bacon testify to his utter abandonment of himself to his friend's service. In one he writes : "She (that is, the Queen) in a passion bade me go to bed, if I could talk of nothing else. Wherefore in a passion I went away, saying, while I was with her I could not but solicit for the

cause and man I so much affected." In another he comforts Bacon by telling him that the Queen "doth not contradict confidently, which they that know the minds of women say is a sign of yielding." Bacon threatened that, if refused the place, he would retire with a couple of men to Cambridge, and there spend his life in studies and contemplations. But neither Bacon's threats, nor Essex's ardour, nor yet the colder advocacy of Burleigh, availed Bacon aught; the Solicitorship went to another. Bacon swallowed his disgust, and did not retire to Cambridge. In a few months Egerton's elevation to the office of Lord Keeper, threw open the Mastership of the Rolls to legal ambition, and Bacon at once turned a longing eye on the place. Essex was at Plymouth, deep in preparations for the grand enterprise against Cadiz which in a month's time was to make his own fame and the nation's ring through Europe. Yet he responded promptly and heartily to his friend's appeal. If Bacon was once more disappointed, it was not through lack of zeal in Essex.

While this suit was still waiting for a final answer, others were going on, the ghosts of which flit across Mr. Spedding's pages. One of these is remarkable as involving in its rejection the gravest consequences, if the suitor is to be believed. "I will," writes Bacon to his uncle, "use no reason to persuade your Lordship's mediation but this; that your Lordship and my other friends shall in this beg my life of the Queen; for I see well the Bar will be my Bier, as I must and will use it rather than that my poor Estate

or reputation shall decay. But I stand indifferent whether God call me or her Majesty." That is, if I do not get this post, I will take to practising at the Bar, and the Bar is sure to be the death of me. He did not get the post, but he was, notwithstanding, no more careful to die than he had been before to retire to Cambridge. He then tried to make a bargain with Egerton, offering to give up the reversion of the Clerkship of the Star Chamber to one of Egerton's sons, if Egerton would only induce his mistress to make him Master of the Rolls. But Egerton declined the offer, had perhaps no mind to so one-sided a compact. About this time the death of Sir William Hatton created a vacancy of another kind, and Bacon was as ready to take Sir William's place in his family and household as he had ever been to serve the Queen. Essex rushed with characteristic energy and fire into this new suit of Bacon's; but his fervent pleadings went the way of their predecessors; the lady preferred to be consoled by Coke, who thus a second time carried off a coveted prize from Bacon.

To go through the list of Bacon's applications for good things that were nearly always refused him, in the later years of Elizabeth's and earlier of James' reign, were a wearisome and thankless task. It is worth while, however, to take a passing glance at the motives that he sometimes assigned for his eagerness to get them. In 1600 he petitioned the Queen for an estate. There were three feelings at work, he declares, to make him ask the favour—his love for his mother, who he mightily desired might carry to her grave the comfort

of seeing her son with an unencumbered property, his desire to secure Gorhambury and be able to entertain her Majesty there and “to trim and dress the grounds for her Majesty’s solace,” and his wish to be freed “from the contempt of the contemptible that measure a man by his estate.” This last is that ignoblest of motives which the great-hearted Diogenes of our day has called “striking the surrounding flunkies yellow.” And a few months after James’ accession, when he found a royal favour, the then dishonouring honour of Knighthood, which Ben Jonson refused, within his reach, he asks for it “because of my late disgrace”—an arrest for debt presumably—“and because I have three new Knights in my mess in Gray’s-Inn Commons, and because I have *found out*” (note the phrase) “an alderman’s daughter, an handsome maiden, to my liking.” At that time the King seemed never so happy as when making Knights; and in a few days the high-souled philosopher was able to woo his handsome maiden as *Sir Francis Bacon*. And having, after three years’ wooing, won the handsome maiden, he proceeds to utilise her as he had before utilised his mother.

Pleading anxiously with the Lord Chancellor for the Solicitorship, he wrote, “Were it not to satisfy my wife’s friends, and to get myself out of being a common gaze and speech, I protest before God I would never speak word for it.” And though one feels a shock at hearing or seeing the word “shameless” applied to any part of Bacon’s conduct, yet the word *will* leap to one’s lips in front of one passage of his life. When the death of Elizabeth put him in a flutter

of expectation, and he was busy speeding self-recommendatory letters to every person possessing influence with the new King that he could claim any degree of acquaintance with, he sent one to Southampton, the man who had been tried and condemned with Essex on the day when Bacon stood among the accusers of his former benefactor. In this he assures Southampton "it is as true a thing that God knoweth that this great change hath wrought in me no other change than this, that I may safely be now that which I was truly before." It is a daring thing to say that the force of philosophical effrontery could hardly farther go than this; yet I say it without hesitation.

At last after twenty-seven years of crushing and pushing and elbowing among the "press" of place-hunters Bacon got his feet planted on the lowest round of *his* Jacob's ladder; having, in 1606, wrung from the King a promise of the Solicitorship on the next vacancy, he became Solicitor-General in 1607. Six years later he was made Attorney-General, ten years later Lord Keeper, and eleven years later Lord Chancellor. Thus the ladder was ascended and Heaven gained! But neither in scaling nor in attainment did Bacon's craving allow him any respite. Omitting the smaller instances, we shall just look at two prominent ones. In 1612 his cousin Salisbury, High Treasurer and Secretary of State, died. Bacon thought he would himself make an admirable Secretary, and drew up, perhaps sent to the King, an application for the place. And this brings us face to face with a

very unpleasant feature in Bacon's character, his habit of flattering men in their life-time and depreciating them after their death. Five years before he had told Salisbury, "I do esteem whatsoever I have or may have in this world but as trash in comparison with the honour and happiness to be a near and accepted kinsman to so rare and worthy a counsellor, governor, and patriot." What is his language now? "Now that he is gone in whose life-time the virtues might reckon on destruction with the utmost certainty." The inducements too which he suggests to James are curious: "I will be as ready as a chessman to be wherever your Majesty's royal hand will set me." James, however, chose to be his own Secretary for a time.

The second application is perhaps the strangest of all Bacon's proceedings in this way. Lord Chancellor Egerton having fallen ill, in February, 1616, Bacon jumps at the conclusion that he is going to die, and straightway pens a letter to the King worthy of careful study by those who would know Bacon's literary style and character. He begins by making God the King's gardener. "Your worthy Chancellor, I fear, goes his last day. God hath hitherto used to weed out such servants as grew not fit for your Majesty's garden. But now he hath gathered for himself a true sage, or salvia, out of your garden." "But," he goes on to say, "Your Majesty's service must not be mortal." To save it from such a fate, he is of opinion that his Majesty should appoint *him* to the dying man's place, and points out to his Majesty that his appointment

would give his Majesty the disposal of offices worth £7,600 (about £40,000) per annum, a Chancellor that would be ever on the look out to prevent his Majesty being distracted with business, that was in the good graces of the Lower House, had some interest with the gentlemen of England, and would strengthen the inventive part of the Council, "who now commonly do exercise rather their judgments than their inventions." This was the blowing of his own trumpet, a process for which Bacon never wanted breath; he made as little scruple to dwell on the defects of possible rivals. The Lord Coke, his old enemy the Huddler, "was of an over-ruling nature and would ill fit an over-ruling place," would be more useful in a financial office, and was a popular man—"and popular men are no sure mounters for your Majesty's saddle." Two days after writing this letter he went to see Egerton. A postscript of a note to Villiers tells us the substance of the interview: "My Lord Chancellor is prettily amended. I was with him yesterday almost half an hour. He used me with wonderful tokens of kindness. We both wept, which I do not often." The Chancellor rallied, however; and Bacon had to keep the curb on his impatience for another year.

All through these experiences his eye often wandered to right and to left in search of an occasional wind-fall. At one time he offers to farm the Alienations for the King at a handsome rent; at another he thinks the King ought to give him £2,000 out of certain fines; at another he begged the privilege of "making a baron," that is, selling a peerage—a usual and very lucrative

practice in James' reign—and pocketing the price. But it was after his fall, when suddenly flung out of the Olympus to gain which he had toiled so painfully and borne so much, that he made the most piteous appeals to Buckingham and the King. He begs for an additional pension, for the Provostship of Eton, for payments anticipatory of a handsome pension already granted him, for an immediate remission of his whole sentence and restoration to the House of Lords. He even stooped to pray that an arrear of about £2,000, which had been discovered to be due to the Crown by his half-brother, Sir Nicolas Bacon, should be given him. “It is a suit,” he writes to Buckingham, “whereunto I may, as it were, claim kindred.” Towards the end of his life Bacon figures in history as a kind of St. Simeon Stylites, “battering the gates of Heaven,” *his* Heaven, “with storms of prayer.”

So far for the way he took to win power in the State. But how did he use the power when won? The best that can fairly be said for him is, I think, that he used it in the main not altogether unsatisfactorily. But we should not forget that the side of Bacon's public life, which we can contemplate with the nearest approach to unqualified admiration was not connected with the direct exercise of political power. If I were asked what I believed to be Bacon's most conscious feeling regarding himself, I should answer, intellectual self-confidence. Pride of intellect, some would perhaps prefer to call it, and perhaps they would be right. From first to last Bacon leaned with implicit faith on his own intelligence; whatever else

might play him false, that, he seemed to think, never could. The first article of his creed was the practical infallibility of his own judgment. When still young he told his uncle that he had "taken all knowledge for his province"; and when over forty he discerned in his nature a kind of relationship and familiarity with truth, as being "gifted with desire to seek, patience to doubt, fondness to meditate, slowness to assert, readiness to consider, carefulness to dispose and set in order." It is significant of this element in Bacon's character that on the only two occasions when he took an independent course that displeased the sovereign, he was never for a moment tempted, after he found out his mistake, into an acknowledgment that he had been wrong. He was ready to do anything to atone for his conduct; in the second instance, being Chancellor, he promptly wheeled round and undid everything he had done before in the matter; but neither in the first nor in the second did he utter a single word capable of being construed into a confession of error. The theory of the unconsciousness of genius in its highest developments assuredly receives no support from Bacon's case.

Now either from natural impulse or from motives of self-advancement Bacon scrutinised very keenly and pondered very carefully the politics, domestic and international, the burning religious questions, the tendencies, movements, and other easily-conceived manifestations of the then dominant Time-Spirit. Thus endowed with a piercing and discriminating intellect, and having of his own free will turned that

intellect on the subjects that then engaged the attention of the rulers of men, he considered himself justified in giving advice, generally unasked, to those that needed it most, the great personages that were in the thick of the fight and might therefore, Bacon may have thought, be the better of seeing things as the clearest pair of eyes in Christendom saw them. Accordingly Bacon from his youth up seems to have constituted himself a sort of Counsellor-General—unattached but very willing to be attached—to the great and powerful. He drew up weighty papers of considerations for the Queen, for Walsingham, for Cecil, for Essex, for King James, for anyone in fact that was in a position to profit by the advice and bring profit to the adviser. His first occasional paper, written in his twenty-fifth year, is a letter of advice to the Queen, in which he respectfully interprets to her the leading questions of the hour and prescribes the attitude she ought to take towards them.

Many people would look on this as presumption and monstrous self-conceit; and I will not say they are wrong. A youth of twenty-five, thrusting his views and counsel on the veteran stateswoman, who had taken her seat in the centre of public affairs before her self-appointed adviser was born, and had watched them Argus-eyed ever since, cannot certainly be quoted as an example of all that is most graceful in youth. Yet it is worth noting how much of this volunteered advice is in harmony with the soberest judgment of the present day, and how little of the passion or prejudice of the moment is visible in it.

Indeed, most of these extra-official observations are rich in thought of almost priceless value ; a spirit of calm contemplation, as of one that dwelt in a serener atmosphere, far above the "dust of systems and of creeds," pervades them ; and to us who live on the safe side of the historic convulsions to the movements tending to which these papers belong, they seem weighty with solid practical sense as well. To give a single example : the "considerations touching the Queen's service in Ireland," which he sent to his cousin, Robert Cecil, in 1602, to help him to see his way through the intricacies of the Irish problem then calling as loudly to English statesmen for solution as ever it has called in our own times, reveal him as not only perfect master of the subject but as urging a policy that, in most of its features, everyone not a fanatic now believes would have been the wisest. Let us take this extract as a sample. "Therefore a toleration of religion (for a time not definite) except it be in some principal towns and precincts after the manner of some French edicts, seemeth to me to be a matter warrantable by religion, and in policy of absolute necessity." Yet the one recommendation of Bacon's regarding Ireland that he lived to see carried out, the Plantation of Ulster, has been emphatically condemned by the intolerant dogmatism of later years, that plumes itself on being judicial history ; but fact, I take it, has abundantly vindicated the wisdom of Bacon in this particular in the eyes of those who have not surrendered their natural eyesight to a theory.

But I would limit this almost unqualified com-

mendation of Bacon's expositions of State policy to his comparatively unofficial days. When Attorney-General or Chancellor he seems to have now and then allowed unworthy considerations to dim somewhat his clearness of vision, to have been a little disposed to find a solution of the question before him that would be agreeable to the King rather than one that would be just and politic. The same familiar ground furnishes us with an illustration of this. During his Attorney-Generalship he advised the King to prohibit absolutely the exportation of wools from Ireland, thus doing his worst to strangle in the cradle, for purely selfish purposes, a natural and growing branch of Irish industry, the suppression of which in later times did more to injure Ireland and to evoke the Nemesis under whose lash England still winces than any other single cause. It is suggestive also to compare the tolerant course towards the Catholics that Bacon pleaded for when unemployed with his actual treatment of the Catholics when he was Attorney-General. Writing to the King in 1615, he says, "I have heard more ways than one of an offer of £20,000 for farming the penalties of recusants . . . wherein I will presume to say that my poor endeavours, since I was by your great and sole grace your Attorney, have been no small spurs to make them feel your laws and seek this redemption." But these are among the exceptional cases that prove the rule; and the rule is that Bacon's "considerations," whether upon a War with Spain or upon Sutton's Estate, upon the Pacification of the Church or upon Jury Reform,

are wise with a wisdom far beyond the wisest working wisdom of his century, having but one obvious drawback—that they were too far in advance of the times they were intended to benefit to be of much use to them. This passion for giving advice continued with Bacon to the last; two years after his fall he writes to Buckingham, “But when I look abroad and see the times so stirring, and so much dissimulation, falsehood, baseness and envy in the world, and so many idle clocks going in men’s heads, then it grieveth me much that I am not sometimes at your Lordship’s elbow, that I might give you some of the fruits of the careful advice, modest liberty, and true information of a friend that loveth your Lordship as I do.”

Clear-sighted, however, as Bacon was, he was as blind as the most horn-eyed among his contemporaries to the real significance of the signs of the times. Fourteen years after his death the deepest and broadest political upheaval that has ever convulsed English life put itself in motion, and in two years more became a war that shook the firmest based political and religious fabric in Europe to its foundations. The forces that gave birth to that upheaval were gathering, indeed must have been actively at work, in Bacon’s time; their outward manifestations were familiar, and a subject of grave reflection, to Bacon. Yet his writings betray as little sensibility to the “whitherward” of English politics and religion in his day as they do to the other great spiritual phenomenon that makes his age so absorbingly interesting, the Shakespearean Drama.

The fact is really worth more than a passing thought. Here was the most penetrating and vigilant intelligence that has ever employed itself on contemporary politics, and an imagination of rare breadth and power, entirely ignorant of the leading tendency of the politics they studied and utterly indifferent to the noblest works of imagination that were getting produced and published within a mile's distance. The party that in its manhood scattered Kings and their armies at Naseby and Worcester and gave to England its last King of the old colossal type was called by Bacon in its infancy "a small number of very silly and base people, now by the good remedies that have been used suppressed and worn out." And the picture of a contented people, a Church luminous "as an heaven of stars," a learned and just Bench of Judges, a careful, loyal, and free-spoken Council, an efficient magistracy, and the rest, that Bacon painted for the King as a New Year's gift for 1619 would be ludicrous, if it were not so sad when looked at in the lurid light that a tragic event of almost exactly thirty years later throws upon it. Bacon could gaze fixedly on the face of the sky and of the earth, but could not discern the cloud that had already risen out of the West. The words of Mr. Ruskin, slightly altered, will convey the lesson to us: "Above all things let us see that we be modest in our thoughts, for of this one thing we may be absolutely sure, that all our thoughts are but degrees of darkness."

The study of Bacon's public *acts* will, I think, kindle in the unbiassed mind a very different feeling

from that kindled by a study of his speculations. To me at least many of them are of a very questionable character, though the best informed of Bacon's biographers can see nothing in the worst of them that is not excusable. Bacon's public career has one very suspicious feature ; its history is studded with facts that require elaborate explanations and apologies before the ingenuous mind can be reconciled to them. For Bacon's letters are not like Cromwell's, do not bear the stamp of a disinterested spirit on their very face ; unlimited comment and explanation are necessary. One can easily fancy an essentially upright man doing now and then a thing whose blameless character is not obvious at first sight ; but an essentially upright man doing so many things that require such an expenditure of explanation to show that they were all right as Bacon did is not so easily fancied. And Bacon's justification necessitates the reversal of all that was seemingly solid in our long-established conceptions of English history in James' reign and a reconstruction of that history on an entirely new basis. For with James' whole course of policy, and with many of the proceedings of his reign that later history has pronounced wrong, unjustifiable, ill-judged and wicked, Bacon was closely connected ; the reputation of the reign must stand or fall with his reputation ; it is impossible to defend or excuse him without defending or excusing the master he served under and the men he acted with. From this task of revolutionising our thoughts regarding the character of the British Solomon and of his reign Mr. Spedding

has not shrunk ; his sympathetic readers will carry away from the perusal of his pages notions the very opposite of those found in Lord Macaulay's pages, and even radically different from those given by that most scrupulous and veracious of writers, Mr. Gardiner.

This is the price, then, we must pay for getting Francis Bacon reclaimed to the paths of integrity ; we must unlearn all that we have hitherto learned of a big section of English activity and learn its history all over again, taking special care to change all our sinners into saints and all our saints into sinners. I am not sure whether we shall not also have to overhaul in some measure our old ideas of right and wrong, at any rate have to make those we strive to act by a trifle elastic.

Perhaps the chapter of Bacon's life that looks ugliest to the casual observer as yet a stranger to the power of explanations is the chapter that unfolds his dealings with the young Earl of Essex. Yet Bacon's admirers find no difficulty whatever in it. They admit that Essex worked zealously to advance Bacon's interests, became his champion against every possible rival, laboured with a generous enthusiasm to win office and distinction for him, and when all his efforts failed to overcome the reluctance of the Queen, gave Bacon an estate which he afterwards sold for what would be nearly £9,000 now. They assert, however, that Bacon paid for these benefits by services rendered to Essex of at least equal value—letters of advice and such-like, accepting as literal truth Bacon's own statement : " I did not only labour carefully and industriously in that he set me about, whether it were

matter of advice or otherwise ; but neglecting the Queen's service, my own fortune, and in a sort my vocation, I did nothing but devise and ruminate with myself to the best of my understanding propositions and memorials of anything that might concern his Lordship's honour, fortune, or service." The obligations being thus about equal, there was no reason, they think, why Bacon should not bring into play all his powers of persuasion to insure his former friend's conviction for treason, when he was manifestly guilty of treason. Bacon, they also say, had a stronger feeling within him than friendship, a devouring zeal for the public service ; again to use his own words, "Whatsoever I did concerning that action and proceeding, the trial of Essex, was done in my duty and service to the Queen and the State, in which I would not show myself false-hearted nor faint-hearted for any man's sake living." Bacon, it is clear, was more an antique Roman than a vulgar Englishman ; he would cheerfully have settled the rope round the neck of his own brother to save from the slightest harm a Queen or State—that had offices to bestow !

As to the first of these pleas it can owe its validity only to the principle that all friendship is but a debit and credit account ; and that, when the two sides exactly balance each other, the so-called friends are quits, their relations return to their original state, and each is at liberty to act as if he had never received from, or done a kindness to, the other. Bacon's apology, after his friend's death, is therefore a kind of lawyer's bill : *Dr.* so much advice and looking after

somewhat complicated affairs, *Cr.* so much zeal on various occasions and a small estate. The columns are totted up; the amounts are exactly equal; no one who knows how to do a sum in simple addition can reasonably blame Bacon for giving his professional services to the Crown against Essex. Yet few, I am sure, can see without a pang the largest-brained philosopher of the modern world rising in court and coldly shutting the door of hope against the generous, unselfish, eager-hearted friend of former days, who stood at bay before him gallantly fighting for his life. "I have never yet seen in any case," he said, "such favour shown to any prisoner; so many digressions, such delivering of evidence by fractions, and so silly a defence of such great and notorious treasons"; and so on, giving a keener edge to the axe by every sentence. "To this," an eye-witness reports, "the Earl answered little"; and we can well believe him.

What Essex's case is in Bacon's extra-official public career, Peacham's is in his official. Peacham was a Somersetshire clergyman among whose papers was found a manuscript sermon that had never been preached, in which the King's policy was assailed with unedifying virulence, and a sweeping vengeance was predicted for the King and his ministers. James took fright; the spectre of a wide-spread nefarious Puritan conspiracy rose before his mind; Peacham was seized, charged with treason; and measures were taken to make him disclose the names of his supposed accomplices. Peacham had no accomplices to disclose. Thereupon it was resolved in Council to

put him to the torture, and a warrant was issued to Winwood the Secretary, Bacon the Attorney-General, and six others to see the poor wretch tortured. The warrant was duly executed—in the words of the report, that Bacon himself signed, “Peacham was examined before torture, in torture, between tortures, and after torture.”

The case of the luckless would-be pulpit-libeller need not be pursued in detail further. Though a mighty fuss was made about it, the very record of which covers nearly forty pages of Spedding, it is enough to say here that Peacham was tried for treason at Taunton, found guilty and left for death, the gaol-fever, however, not the gallows, killing him a few months afterwards. It is surely startling to find Bacon almost presiding at the torture of a fellow-creature, only thirteen years before torture was unanimously declared by the judges to be contrary to law ; yet his admirers preserve their equanimity. “All we know,” pleads Mr. Spedding, “is that he did not refuse to be present at an examination under torture.” Even if this were so, it could not much avail Bacon ; but I submit that we know more. We know that he busied himself greatly about Peacham’s case, taking the management of the process of screwing a prejudicial expression of opinion out of the judges concerning it. We know that he wrote lightly, not to say unfeelingly, to the King regarding it : “It grieveth me exceedingly that your Majesty should be so much troubled with this matter of Peacham, whose raging devil seemeth to be turned into a dumb devil.” Bacon

was always very sensitive to the sorrows of kings and great placemen. We know that, five years later, on being called upon to deal with "one Peacock charged with an attempt to infatuate the King's judgment by sorcery," and finding Peacock too possessed by a dumb devil, this Chancellor of Nature's laws *recommended* torture. His own words are, "I make no judgement yet but will go on with all diligence ; and if it may not be done otherwise, it is fit Peacock be put to the torture. He deserveth it as well as Peacham did."

But, another admirer urges, Bacon was doing no more than his duty in seeing Peacham tortured ; he was first law-officer of the Crown, and as such was bound to carry out his instructions. Exactly so ; and high authority might be quoted in support of the plea. When Prince Henry laughs at Falstaff's sudden change of humour "from praying to purse-taking," Falstaff's self-justification is unanswerable, "Why Hal ! 'tis my vocation, Hal, 'tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation !"

Of Bacon's conduct as Lord Keeper and Lord Chancellor I have left myself little time to speak. I am not aware that fault has been found with his general discharge of the duties of his office ; and posterity seems to have acquiesced in his own judgement of himself—"I was the justest judge that was in England these fifty years." The two broad blemishes—to use the very mildest term possible regarding them—on his judicial career are, that he too often listened to Buckingham's one-sided applications on behalf of suitors in his court, and that he had what

Shakespeare calls "an itching palm"—a few hundred pounds slipped into his hand by a litigant seldom found its way back to its original owner. Here is a sample of Buckingham's letters: "Lest my often writing may make your Lordship conceive that this letter has been drawn from me by importunity, I have thought fit, for preventing of any such conceit, to let your Lordship know, that Sir John Wentworth, whose business I now recommend, is a gentleman whom I esteem more than an ordinary degree. And therefore I desire your Lordship to show him what favour you can for my sake in his suit, which his Majesty hath referred to your Lordship, which I will acknowledge as a courtesy to me." With regard to the second blemish, Bacon himself, when impeached, pleaded guilty to twenty-seven circumstantially-stated instances of taking gifts from suitors. But it is alleged that his guilt in these two particulars, crimson as its dye looks to the carelessly-glancing spectator, fades into a comparatively neutral tint before a searching examination. Neither of his aberrations marred the character of his decisions; he read Buckingham's letter or took the suitor's money or cabinet, and then decided according to the merits of the case and the law that ruled it; no charge of having perverted justice was ever made against him; the Commons themselves, while arraigning him as a corrupt judge, never questioned even the soundness of a single decision.

Moreover, most of the gratuities—for that is the happy euphemism by which apologetic literature draws the fangs of the case against Bacon—"were received after

the cause had been ended and without relation to any precedent promise"; and to accept such gratuities Bacon, to use his own words, "conceived to be no fault." And to crown all, the Chancellor's oath contained no clause against corruption; and corruption in a Chancellor was not forbidden by either the written or unwritten law of England. These are the leading features of the case for the defence. I cannot discuss the questions raised in it now, can only commend to your consideration two things, that one mitigatory plea leaves Bacon open at any rate to the charge of having sold justice; another fights with air—Bacon neither was, nor is, accused of *perjury*.

Time presses; I have already taxed your patience severely; I must be satisfied with indicating merely one or two topics of interest connected with the subject that still remain. Bacon's love of management, which he himself describes as "a middle thing between art and chance," strikes one very often in watching his ways. He took a pleasure in laying little traps, generally harmless, in arranging for a longish pedigree of events in which the last was the thing sought, in aiming with a great show of earnestness at one object while all the time he was intent at knocking over another. It was an innocent game of guile, appropriate in the servant of the great master of transparent Kingcraft that then ruled England. Then his extravagant flattery of the great, especially of King James, must surely be offensive to every mind not yet fortified against healthy human feeling by reasonings and explanations. And his taste for expense and

love of splendour, by keeping him constantly in debt, accounts for much of what is condemnable or questionable in his career. These, however, are forbidden ground to-night.

To conclude: the general impression of Bacon's character that a careful and certainly not unfavourably prepossessed reading of his letters and occasional papers has left on my mind is something like this. He was not a man to whom superlatives or strong language of any colour can fairly be applied. He was not the meanest of mankind. "Base" and "despicable," "generous" and "noble," are words that the historian of Bacon's life will never have occasion to draw from his vocabulary. Most assuredly his place is not with the morally-great, the strong-hearted, much enduring, self-sacrificing, heroic spirits, the Keplers and Newtons, the Miltons and Johnsons. What are our feelings towards Kepler as we think of his divine patience watching the motions of the star Mars "with calculations repeated seventy times?" What would be our feelings towards Milton did we suddenly come upon evidence that he was in the habit of taking "gratuities" from suitors to the Lord Protector? Yet his sin would be white compared with Bacon's. Bacon's place is not with these; it is with the Lakes, the Cranfields, the Yelvertons, the Nevilles of his day; ranked with such men he is a respectable figure enough. It is when you withdraw him from the crew of contemporary politicians and courtiers, and set him among the great and noble of all time that his figure shrinks and his features become commonplace. There is no trace of the heroic

about his moral character; there is nothing in the man that appeals to the universal heart; nothing to stir enthusiasm, nothing to win admiration. His literary partisans struggle desperately for his good name; but the utmost that their efforts, if successful, could gain from us is that we should refrain from condemning. His nature wanted elevation, a finer tone, a richer flavour; his motives were the motives of the crowd of self-seekers around him. As Carlyle says of Coleridge, here we have "once more the tragic story of a high endowment with an insufficient will." We might even go farther and say that Bacon lacked common manliness. When misfortune came he lost all sense of dignity, buried himself in his bed-clothes, moaned forth his confessions of guilt and begged piteously for mercy: "My lords, it is my act, my hand, my heart. I do beseech you, my Lords, be merciful to a broken reed." Compare the demeanour of one or two other historic Englishmen in the presence of circumstances immeasurably more trying. The cheery humour of More, the calm self-possession of Raleigh, the stately self-respect of Strafford, the high-toned courage of Vane, remain for ever part of England's wealth and the world's; their story gives a warmer tint to life. But Bacon prostrate and crying for mercy—this is a sight that no one can care to look at; the emotion it awakens is neither sympathy nor pity.

The truth would seem to be that Bacon hardly ever touches Humanity on the moral and emotional side. He seems to have been incapable of deep feeling, seems hardly ever to have known what love or hate

was ; there are few traces of tenderness in his letters and papers ; there are as few traces of malice. His was an almost passionless nature ; there was little moral spontaneity of any kind. He had even to jot down among his memoranda "to have in mind the Attorney's weaknesses" and to run up a column of that official's disadvantages for his future use. Mr. Spedding construes these and similar memoranda of Bacon's into a proof of his goodness of nature ; an evil nature would have remembered all these against a man whose place it sought to fill without tables. This explanation makes Bacon a man who deliberately does violence to his own nature, commits treason against his own soul, for selfish ends. The fact rather is, that Bacon had no natural impulse either to good or to evil ; and had his intellect told him that it would be for his interest to do a good action of a particular kind, he would have had to jot down a memorandum of it also. For in Bacon's opinion intellect held the highest place : "A man is but what he knoweth," he wrote in his thirty-fourth year ; and then continues : "Are not the pleasures of the affections greater than the pleasures of the senses, and are not the pleasures of the intellect greater than the pleasures of the affections ?" Yet—this knowledge—

"What is she, cut from love and faith,
But some wild Pallas from the brain
Of Demons ? fiery hot to burst
All barriers in her onward race
For Power. Let her know her place
She is the second not the first."

“Born for the Universe”—the phrase is almost his own — Bacon narrowed, not his mind — that was incompressible—but his soul, and gave up to his worse self, to his craving after power, distinction, grandeur, everything that the philosophical mind professes to despise most, those peerless gifts, that might have made his name an ennobling influence to all time.

BURKE AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

An Article by James Rowley

Reprinted from *The National Review*, July, 1887

Burke and the French Revolution

I PROPOSE to add one more to the many expositions already made of the course taken by Burke in the crowning passage of his life and of European history in his century. This design may seem both superfluous and presumptuous. But I see no reason to apologise for it : the present enlightened age is not remarkable for the length of its memory ; even a halting attempt to remind it of the reasons and motives that determined the conduct of our greatest political thinker at an extraordinary crisis may not be thrown away. In any case, such a reminder can hardly be held to be inopportune—indeed, is never inopportune ; Burke's thoughts are always in season, are of the order that “ custom cannot stale.”

My work is, however, one of exposition merely ; my only effort is to reach some degree of clearness regarding the exact meaning of Burke's hostility to the French Revolution, the modes of thought and feeling, the moral and intellectual springs of action that ruled in Burke's nature, and set him, almost from the first, in unrelenting antagonism to the movement. My primary aim, in fact, is not criticism ; is neither to justify nor to condemn ; it is simply to get a good look at the subject, to gaze steadily at the chief workings, during the last seven years of their activity on earth,

of one of the richest natures that have ever toiled in the cause of England and of humanity, until they consent to give up their secret—which they cheerfully do to anyone that honestly seeks for it. Burke's hatred of that master-movement of modernism, of that ruthless creature and creator of the mysterious force that critics name the modern spirit, for a time absorbed almost all his energies, exhausted his spirits, and, as some think, brought his life to a premature close. There stands on record no historic example of a deeper-seated, more inveterate, more unappeasable, more illimitable rage. Very irrational, unphilosophic, and wrong-headed it all seems ; the emotion of the critical mind before it was once most touching ; certain critics still shake their heads over it, and bewail the waywardness of genius. One great authority not long ago read madness in it, but wisely thought it would be "displaying a morbid curiosity to attempt to raise the veil, and trace the decay of so mighty a mind."¹ Of its sanity, however, its entire reasonableness, even its obligatory force, Burke himself never had a doubt ; to him the warfare of these seven years was absolutely of a piece with the warfare of the twenty-five that preceded, was but "one fight more, the *best* and the last." In such a subject there is surely no lack of the larger elements of human interest.

An earlier and well-known passage of Burke's career so decidedly illustrates that side of his nature which revealed itself with such distinctness in his attitude towards the French Revolution, that it may be useful

¹ Buckle.

to glance at it first. I refer to his connection with Bristol. His conduct during that connection looks like a serious rehearsal, in a narrower field and on modester conditions, of the part he was to play in the most awful of all practical issues.

Rather more than a hundred years ago, in October, 1774, Burke stood for the first time on the Bristol hustings, having a few minutes before finished his sleepless drive of forty-eight continuous hours from the little Yorkshire borough that had just gone through the formality of electing him ; the honour, the "awful situation," as he called it, which he had been suddenly asked by the local Whig leaders to seek, being in his opinion one that justified unusual exertions. Though tardy in his arrival and even in his nomination, he gained the awful situation, beating his opponent at the poll and on the petition that followed the election. But the alliance was hardly formed when the seeds of dissolution were sown. Burke and his new constituents were at issue from the first on a constitutional question that has not yet lost its importance ; they deemed him bound to speak and vote in Parliament as they instructed. He contended—and frankly told them his contention in his speech after the election—that he was under no such obligation, that he owed them not his industry alone, but his judgment also ; that he was member, not for Bristol only, but for the whole nation also ; that in the august image of Great Britain which met in St. Stephen's Chapel, "not local purposes, nor local prejudices, ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole."

This boded ill for the harmony of the connection ; and the sequel proved in strict keeping with the unpromising beginning. Burke found in Bristol a jealous and exacting taskmistress, Bristol found in Burke a too self-willed and broad-minded servant, most provokingly given to taking national and rational, instead of provincial and prejudiced views of public questions, and, worst of all, to voting on these questions as reason and conscience dictated. Their judgments, therefore, often differed. Burke judged that justice and sound policy alike called for some relaxation of the cruel and senseless legal bonds to which Irish industry and commercial enterprise had hitherto been condemned ; Bristol judged otherwise, and sent its members peremptory orders to oppose the measures of relief brought in by the Government. These orders Burke disobeyed. "I conformed," he proudly said to his constituents afterwards, "to the instructions of truth and nature, and maintained your interest against your opinions with the constancy that became me."

Burke judged that justice and humanity alike called for some mitigation of the old savage law of debt, which turned English prisons into hells swarming with woe-stricken wretches guilty of the unpardonable crime of ill-success ; Bristol judged otherwise, and petitioned against, and directed its members to oppose, a very modest little Bill that Lord Beauchamp sought to carry with a view of abating the scandal. Again Burke spoke and voted as brain and heart, not as his constituents, prompted. Lastly, Burke judged that the time had come for relieving English Roman

Catholics from the inhuman, insulting, and motiveless legal disabilities that cast a malignant shadow on the lives of many of England's worthiest sons, and gave his hearty support to the measure for repealing the statute that had imposed them. But the slumbering furies of a degenerate Protestantism at once awoke, and lashed certain of Burke's constituents into a rage against him that was not godlike ; and this rage they treasured up and nursed in their hearts until the day of reckoning should come. For these sins against light and knowledge, when the day came, Bristol turned its back on the broadest-minded and manliest political thinker that has ever sat in Parliament, and put in his place some vanished shadow, who doubtless did not hold the dangerous doctrine that the voice of reason and justice was to be obeyed rather than the voice of his constituents. But Burke bore no grudge against his fickle supporters, and once more took the bye-way into the Commons which the little Yorkshire borough, on a hint from its magnanimous patron, again cheerfully threw open to him.

For all that, humanity is under some obligation to Bristol on this occasion. To its choice of Burke, and its dealings with Burke when chosen, we owe some half-dozen political speeches and letters that for solid value are, in their kind, unmatchable in our language except by other utterances of the same speaker and writer. This ample return that Burke made to his constituents was made, not to Bristol only, but to the world ; for among his distinguishing characteristics was the singular incapacity of speaking or writing

upon any question to any audience or correspondents anything of merely limited or ephemeral interest, or—to borrow a later expression of his own—of merely “parochial importance.” Nothing of his would consent to narrow its area of activity, or to die. Thus the Bristol of our great-grandfathers earned a renown that no other city has yet won—a renown that will last as long as the language. The only election speeches that have proved their right to a place in the front rank of English classics were spoken in the Bristol Guildhall; the only letters to local officials to which the generations have sought, still seek, and will long continue to seek for light and strength, were addressed to Bristol sheriffs; the memory of Samuel Span, Esq., must continue long to belie his name. Preserved in the amber of Burke’s words, these names will live long.

Here I have touched on what seems to me the most wonderful fact concerning Burke, the fact that bears unerring witness to the singularly exceptional, the almost transcendent character of his genius. Though a party-man, and too often an intemperate party-man, all his life, though having generally under his eye and in his heart the ordinary party-question of the hour, though usually longing for a party-triumph as the immediate goal of his desire, though seeming to his hearers to outstrip his peers only in party-passion and the unmeasured violence of his denunciations, he could not lift his voice in Parliament or on the hustings, could not pen a pamphlet in the cause of his party, could not write a letter explanatory of a vote, without falling into a strain of thought and feeling, seemingly

the mere natural effusion of the moment, that had not a perennial, universal element in it, springing direct from the centre of force, to enlighten, invigorate, and refresh the souls of men throughout the ages. To him it was a destiny unshunnable as death to speak with the large thought of a born thinker, and with an equally large utterance, after a fashion of his own, in which he has never had an equal nor even an imitator.

These kingdoms have given birth to a fair share of political philosophers and a fairer share of orators, both of undisputed excellence, but, besides Burke, to none that was both philosopher and orator, and supreme as both. Mr. Matthew Arnold quarrels with Goldsmith's well-worn criticism of him, alleging that it is far from true that Burke "to party gave up what was meant for mankind." I hold, however, that Goldsmith was right, and yet that Mr. Arnold is not wrong ; and that the special character and full grandeur of Burke's genius may best be seen in the reconciliation of these apparent contradictions. Regarded from the outside, Burke's public career was one of almost unbroken and single-minded devotion to the cause of party ; for twenty-five years he lavished the whole wealth of his nature on the service of party ; he seemed never to grow weary of straining his throat to persuade the Tommy Townshends of the day to lend him their votes ; in that part of the volume of his works which precede his writings on the Revolution hardly an utterance may be found which had not party feeling as its immediate motive, and did not reach forward to party ends. But through all a potent force was

constantly working ; the higher intellect, the larger soul, the more human heart, were asserting themselves ; the insuppressible element in him that belonged to the Universe and the Future, kept perpetually bursting through the external crust of what belonged merely to party connection and the present ; in fact, while Burke the Whig was storming, perorating, hurling sarcasm, scorn, defiance at the Right Honourable Gentleman on the floor, or the Noble Lord in the Blue Ribbon, rising and sinking through all the moods in the scale of eloquence, Burke the Immortal was calmly shaping the glorious thoughts that enrich the understanding and animate the soul. Under Burke the Whig men, even men of intellect and sensibility, fell asleep, while they thumbed the works of Burke the Immortal to rags. Burke undoubtedly did give up his entire energies to party, but as undoubtedly these energies proved themselves in the consequences to have been *meant* for mankind. At all events, mankind has them, and will be slow to part with them.

In this respect it is, perhaps, not altogether fanciful to trace a resemblance between Burke and Shakespeare. The Globe Theatre, the pleasure of the pleasure-seekers that assembled there, his own worldly interests and those of his fellows—these and such-like things formed the conditions under which Shakespeare wrote ; the first longing of his heart was to make plays that would fill the house, bring grist to the mill, wealth and the consideration that comes from wealth to himself. But the miraculous power that dwelt in the man, his countless gifts and inborn graces, the sum, in

fact, of those mysterious faculties that men call the genius of Shakespeare, were busy doing their work in everything he did ; and while he was painfully toiling in "the forge and working-house of thought," hammering out quips and conceits and verbal quibbles that might tickle the fancies of the wits, or blowing out swelling bombast that might gratify the ears of the groundlings, they—these mystic creative forces—were insensibly moulding his material into deathless dramas, beautiful works of art, were making the obscure London playwright "immortal in his own despite." Shakespeare's greatness lies in this, that, while consciously writing for the Globe Theatre, and with homely though not ignoble aims, he was led, perhaps unconsciously, at most half-consciously, into writing for the Universe also. Now the Whig Party and the House of Commons were Burke's Globe Theatre ; to forward the interests of his connection, in which his own were included, to harass and damage his political foes, to hasten the happy day of Tory defeat and Whig accession to office, were his primary objects ; and to the gaining of these he bent the full might of his matchless powers. But by the operation of the universal genius within him, to which the Whig Party was but a section of humanity and the existing generation but one of a long series of generations stretching back into the dim past and forward into the dark future, the *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, the speeches on *Conciliation with America*, *Economical Reform*, *The Nabob of Arcot's Debts*, his great Bristol speech, even the *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, issued

from his lips or study as classic compositions, weighty with thought, rich in world-wisdom, not unworthy of as high a place among their kind as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *The Tempest* were among theirs. Burke spoke often to dull, if not deaf, ears in his own time ; but his real hearers have proved to be those on whose ears his voice never fell.

Burke's work in his Whig harness, however, was not thrown away ; far from it. We have no reason to deplore his eager pursuit of political distinction, or to be jealous of "the Saviles, the Dowdeswells, the Wentworths, the Bentincks," for their apparent monopoly of a life that belonged to mankind. Just the reverse is the case ; we have reason to be glad of it. Not only was Burke thereby enabled to do more than one splendid stroke of work in practical legislation, and for the general good, but also half, perhaps more than half, the value of the immortal part of him is due to his knowledge and experience of practical politics, to his perfect mastery of those politics in all their details. A close and accurate observer, as well as an untiring student, he had gained a familiarity with the vast and complicated working of the State machine, from its very pulse to its commonest outward manifestations, had more than once presided in one of its departments, and shown an aptitude for the management of public business without parallel before or since in a man of radically speculative genius. His, therefore, was no purely speculative genius ; in his highest flights of thought and imagination his eye never strayed from the busy,

bustling, but to him undistracting, work of public life and action ; seldom did his feet lose their hold on the firm earth. Had Burke never been drawn into active politics, or been drawn into them before letters had won a goodly share of his allegiance, he could not have failed to develop into a mere political philosopher with a restless, insatiable brain, an unchecked imagination, and an imperfect sense of the impossible, or a mere statesman of the passing generation, a brilliant debater, an efficient administrator, a popular orator, a spirit of the storm in Parliament and the country, in a word must have grown into a William Godwin or a Charles Fox. Not only was he both “of an age and for all time,” but he also could not have been so effectually “for all time” had he not been “of an age” as well.

Burke “is so great,” says Mr. M. Arnold, “because, almost alone in England, he brings thought to bear on politics, saturates politics with thought.” Here, again, I venture to be imperfectly satisfied with a judgment of the great critic’s. Undoubtedly, Burke was great because of the fact stated, but not so great ; his habitual saturation of politics with thought does not explain the full measure of his greatness, leaves still a considerable complement to be accounted for, does not rise to the height of the argument. Men of genius have, I think, lived in England as rich in political thought as he, who have missed Burke’s greatness. Burke is so great, I take it, because in him, alone of British men, we have strong, manly, liberal thought, and strong, manly, liberal feeling combined ; have a

wealth of intellect and a wealth of generous emotion blended in the closest of possible unions. It is not altogether that his intellectual part and his moral part grew and laboured side by side on equal terms, that head and heart always moved together by a kind of pre-established harmony ; it is something more than either. It is that in him the thinking faculty and the emotional force formed a single irresistible energy, have united into a sort of spiritually-chemical compound ; in any case—to use Coleridge's word—"interpenetrate" each other.

Like Joubert, Burke had a "very headstrong heart and a very loving head" ; his most passionate passages are laden with thought, his most thoughtful are warm with generous passion. I might go farther and say, that the various simples whose aggregate made Burke's spiritual endowment, had become fused together into a single, grand master-virtue ; at any rate, the orderly array of his manifold powers went to war against wickedness, stupidity, and bigotry, with a singleness of aim, a concentrated vigour, and a precision that could come only from a single life animating them all. It is this fact that gives elevation of sentiment and tone to Burke's nature.

Whatever he touched became at once gilded with a winning glow ; he approached the most vulgar concerns of politics in the spirit of religion. "In the way that men call party, I worship the constitution of your fathers," he wrote to the Sheriffs of Bristol ; and men love to repeat the words, and gather strength from

them still. Him no curiously-cut and curiously-finished, no lifeless definition of the State will satisfy ; the energy of a moving passion must be shot through it, and make it a living thing for men. "The State is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence, of a temporary and perishable nature. It is a partnership in all science, a partnership in all art, a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born."

Some of us hear now and then of a thing called historical perspective ; but Burke alone, who never heard of it, can define it in words that stick to one. It is "that elevation of thought which places centuries under our eye, and brings things to the true point of comparison, which obscures little names and effaces the colours of little parties, and to which nothing can ascend but the spirit and moral quality of human actions." His works are sown thick with examples ; these few have, I hope, adequately illustrated my meaning. Burke was himself conscious of this exceeding sensibility. "It is a subject," he once wrote of a passing question, "on which I have often reflected, and never reflected without feeling from it." When Francis told him that his high-pitched eloquence about the sorrows of Marie Antoinette was "pure foppery," "I tell you again," wrote Burke in reply, "that the recollection of the manner in which I saw the Queen

of France in 1774, and the contrast between that brilliancy and beauty and the prostrate homage of a nation to her, and the abominable scene of 1789 which I was describing, *did* draw tears from my eyes, and wetted my paper." This, then, would seem to be the true source of Burke's greatness, the secret of his continuous sway over the minds of men. Other great speakers have had it in them to steep in feeling their "strenuous, direct, high-spirited talent of oratory," supposed to be exclusively characteristic of our race, and thereby to conquer the applause alike of listening senates and of popular audiences; but the kindling spirit of their eloquence has died away with men's interest in its subject, and a stagnant pool of rhetoric alone remains. Other great writers on politics have thought deeply, reasoned logically, and speculated brilliantly; but, lacking that wide human interest, that large capacity of feeling, that broad practical knowledge, that come only to great natures from contact with great affairs, they either do not move at all, or move the men that move the world. But in Burke the two capacities inseparably co-exist; and the result is that his speeches—the remark is Mr. Leslie Stephen's—"are the only English speeches which may still be read with profit when the hearer and the speaker have long been turned to dust."

At this point I am again tempted into the slippery ways of paradox. It was Coleridge's opinion that Burke "rarely showed all his powers unless when he was in a passion"; and it was also Coleridge's opinion that "in his writings the germs of almost all political

truths might be found." If this view be correct, passion did for Burke what he himself says "strong passions" often do for men, "awaken the faculties. They allow not a particle of the man to be lost." My paradox is, that in his case passion sharpened and extended his vision, made him see clearer, and see farther than his calmer mood ; that which usually dims, and sometimes blinds the inward eye, purged his. Perhaps his passion was but the boundless interest that he took in everything that concerned mankind, was the passion of humanity, putting an intense strain on all his nobler faculties, and so working them up to a pitch of efficiency little short of prodigious. His writings on the French Revolution are instinct with a passion that is always transcendent, often, too often, furious, once or twice even convulsive, a passion to which I know no parallel save one in our literature, that of the *Latter Day Pamphlets*. Yet in no other English writings are there found so many indisputable proofs of extensive, correct, and even minute foresight ; his conception of the movement may have been false, and was certainly inadequate ; but the almost unerring power that he shows of foretelling many of its immediate, and not a few of its remote consequences, is extremely startling. We shall have a few examples of it shortly. It is true, painfully true, that this passion of Burke's often became his master, and swept him headlong into deplorable extravagances of thought and speech. Hence those numerous passages in this group of his works, that shock most readers, irritate some, and sadden others, passages that the

ungovernable rage of the moment have stamped with all the faults of violence, injustice, and bad taste. For Burke's faults—and he had many—are all faults of excess ; his passionate sensibility had a trick of swiftly passing into an exceeding fiery temper, under whose influence he lost for a moment all sense of propriety and played fantastic tricks that made the irreverent scoff and the judicious grieve.

Burke's bearing towards the movement in France that a few months after it received its official impulse became the Great Revolution had something distinctive in it almost from the first. An unflinching and zealous Whig all his life, a vehement champion of the Americans throughout their Revolution, a vigilant guardian of the cause of Liberty everywhere, and an active reformer, he would seem to have given this movement a cold welcome into the political world, to have looked at it askance and with a questioning air even at the outset. His heart certainly did not go out towards it as the hearts of the other great Whigs did ; instead of sympathising with it he observed it curiously ; "the thing," he wrote to a friend in August, 1789, "has somewhat in it paradoxical and mysterious . . . the progress of the whole affair is one of the most curious matters for speculation that ever was exhibited." Then came misgivings ; he began to watch the thing narrowly and nervously ; and long before it had disclosed its special character to others, he came to the conclusion regarding it that all the world has long known. Not only did he lose all faith in it, but he conceived a hatred of it that gave him no rest, and

drove him into a warfare against it that ceased only with his latest breath. His wrath was fed by various streams of feeling, contempt and horror, disgust and terror, sorrow because of the deluge of woes that he saw about to burst over the world from this single source, a pervading sense of the scandal that "the red fool fury of the Seine" was bringing on the cause he loved. To his political friends his conduct was inscrutable and alarming; while their hearts swelled with enthusiasm, and they proclaimed their assurance of the infinite promise that lay in the movement for France and Europe, glorifying it in Parliament whenever the rules of debate permitted, he declared in reply that "he would spend his last breath, and the last drop of his blood, he would quit his best friends, and join his worst enemies, to oppose the least tittle of such a spirit or such an example in England."

This was early in 1790, when his great book was yet unpublished. And for a year or two after this he stood utterly alone; not one even of the Tory leaders shared in his convictions. There is indeed a striking and most instructive contrast between the feelings that the Revolution excited in Burke, the way-worn statesman and veteran thinker, whose whole life, as he was once stung into boasting, had been a struggle for the liberty of others, and those of the budding philosophers and poets — Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey — who were eagerly looking forward to a wider and more animated life spent in the same ennobling service. *They* found it "bliss in that dawn to be alive," and "very heaven to be young." "Alas!"

moaned Burke, "the few of us who have protracted life in any measure near to the extreme limits of our short period, have been condemned to see strange things, new systems of policy, new principles, and, not only new men, but what might appear a new species of men." Yet in a few years every one of these spirits of the dawn had been sucked into the whirlpool of Toryism ; and in the Tory faith they all died.

The story of his secession from the Whig ranks and solemn renunciation before Parliament of his allegiance to the leader that he had often led, has been told a hundred times ; and I will spare my readers its recital. His conduct in thus severing himself from a party with whose traditional principles he was in perfect agreement, only because he had a different opinion from its other leaders about the affairs of a neighbouring country, had few defenders then, and has many assailants still, and undoubtedly it was in consequence the signal—some say the cause—of a long succession of disasters and humiliations to the Whigs. But to Burke the French Revolution was the most momentous question for European, and therefore for English, statesmen that had arisen for ages, a question that for a generation at least would make all other questions of little account ; for English statesmen to misinterpret it, to choose the wrong road in dealing with it, might, in his opinion, mean a train of political and social convulsions, calamities, horrors, such as England had not suffered since she became a civilised nation. The thing in the speeches of Fox and Sheridan that pained and alarmed him

most was the insinuation, if not actual assertion, that it might be well for England to copy the new French fashions in some points. That French Constitution, which proved to be only the first in what Charles Lamb would call a quarter of a mile of constitutions—the one that wouldn't march—Fox pronounced “the most stupendous and glorious edifice of liberty which had been erected on the foundation of human integrity in any time and country”; and Burke, who regarded this imposing structure as the perfection of human *unwisdom*, was aghast at his friend's words. To act with a party whose leaders held opinions that he felt to be fatal seemed impossible; and he abandoned it, retiring not long after from Parliament also. His last advice to his old pupil and chief, who freely owned that he had been instructed more by him than by all other men and books put together—who had, in fact, “learned his great language, caught his clear accents”—was “Fly from the French Constitution.” To Burke, this Constitution was the political wrath to come.

This passage in Burke's life repeats in some of its features, but in connection with a vastly wider range of interests, his experience at Bristol; and we are under a similar obligation to the causes that led to it. There is, however, this difference between our gains from the earlier, and those from the later source, that the latter belong almost exclusively to literature in its strictest form, consist of *Reflections*, *Thoughts*, *Appeals*, *Considerations*, *Letters*, and such like: his audience is no longer Parliament and his party only,

but Britain and Europe. But, whether it be with pen or lips, Burke always *speaks*, is always a voice. We do not read him, we listen to him ; it is curious that all his writings of the Revolution group, save one or two of secondary value, are addressed to real persons, there would seem to have been a stimulus for him in even the imagined presence of a hearer. Hence comes, perhaps, the moving, kindling, pulsating power that informs these ; hence, too, perhaps, the grand roll and swell, the sustained volume as well as penetrating intensity of eloquence that characterise them. From no prose works of English growth have come forth so many of those utterances that peal through the souls of men from generation to generation. Throughout these writings reigns a single tyrannous conviction, that this French Revolution was "a vast, tremendous, unformed spectre," and that it had arisen in a guise far more terrific than any which had yet overpowered the imagination and subdued the fortitude of men ; throughout them rings one dominant note, the note of undying hatred and enmity, a note that at times becomes almost a hiss of concentrated scorn and defiance, which says as plainly as words can say, "Here, ye raging and blustering Anarchic Powers, is one son of order whom you will never bend to your will, who will fight against you as long as his fingers can hold a pen."

These writings begin with arraigning the Revolution at the judgment-bar of civilised mankind as proceeding upon false and fatal principles ; they end with an impassioned protest against England making peace

with the Anarchic Powers until the objects of the war had been fully gained. So fierce and unrelenting is the spirit that rages in this last of his works that once at least it made Mr. Buckle's flesh creep ; it contains a sentence which this historian, who goes very near idolatry in his admiration of its writer, stigmatises as "a horrible sentence, perhaps the most horrible ever penned by an English politician." This horror of Mr. Buckle's, though, in my opinion, without fair warrant, is significant of the character of the work.

The explanation of this unwelcome temper and conduct in a much-loved statesman Mr. Buckle found in a diseased condition of Burke's brain. "It would be affectation," he said, "to deny that . . . during the last few years of his life the feelings of Burke finally o'ermastered his reason ; the balance tottered ; the proportions of that gigantic intellect were disturbed." Buckle's case is stronger than he seems himself to have suspected ; there are more convincing proofs of it than that "it is certain," "is evident," that one Member of Parliament "hinted at Burke's madness, even in his presence," that another reports him as having "finished his wild speech in a manner next to madness," that he denounced the Republic and its leaders with unmeasured violence, and never wearied of pelting them with words and phrases of furious abuse. There is the unimpeachable testimony of Citizen Lasource, who warmed his imagination with a vision of that glorious coming day when "that Orestes of the British Parliament, that madman

Burke," would first "be laid prostrate before the altar of Liberty," and then "mount the scaffold that awaits him." There is the equally unimpeachable testimony of the whisper that stole through the clubs that he was often seen going about his Beaconsfield farm kissing his horses and hugging his cows. Notwithstanding these weighty proofs, however, I for one am still unconvinced. If Burke were mad when he wrote the *Letter to a Noble Lord*, one would not mind having a touch of his disease ; if he were mad when he called Robespierre an "execrable villain," he was madder when he called Warren Hastings a "swindling Mæcenæ." If an excessive indulgence in the luxury of abusing the upholders of hated opinions be a mark of madness, most men of genius have been mad at times. In any case, Burke's lucid intervals are so numerous, so prolonged, and so inspiriting, that we only regret, and readily forgive, his relapses into his normal state.

It may be that there was a touch of fanaticism in Burke. It is a sharp saying of Macaulay's, that he chose his side like a fanatic and defended it like a philosopher. To my mind, it would be nearer, yet still a good way from, the truth to say that he chose his side like a philosopher and defended it like a fanatic. But after all, what open-minded man, what honest thinker, ever *chooses* his side ? In all the great crises of life at least, it is his side that chooses him. His side has been determined from the first by conditions that dictate and will be obeyed ; the so-called choosing is merely the process whereby the imperious dictator

works his will. This, I suspect, is the true explanation of the attitude towards the French Revolution that his political friends, somewhat to their surprise, found Burke firmly planted in while that movement had hardly yet got under weigh. I am disposed to agree with his own contention, that his public career, from the day he entered Parliament to the day he left it, was substantially consistent, that he was as good a Whig when he wrote his famous vindication of the pension he accepted from the Crown as when he wrote the *Present Discontents*, and that his course in throwing the weight of his voice and pen into the scale against the Revolution, was not only in entire harmony with the principles of his whole life hitherto, but already determined by the strength of his attachment to those principles. I think that had there been among his contemporaries another man of equal honesty, sagacity, penetration, power and depth of feeling—in a word, another Burke—who had made him his study as much as he made politics and society in the past and present *his*, he—this other Burke—would have been able to foretell that our Burke would be an irreconcilable enemy of such a movement as the French Revolution, and the most uncompromising antagonist of its friends, even if some of these had been the dearest among his own.

A clear-sighted student, who had the intellectual conscience to fix his attention exclusively on the essentials of a political creed, would be able, I am convinced, to trace an unbroken continuity of fundamental doctrine throughout Burke's works from

his earliest to his latest. And the reason why his wrath was kindled into a flame of seven-fold intensity against the French Revolution was, that it struck at the heart of his system of political belief; if its principles and ideas were sound, then the faith he had clung to and preached his whole life was a fond imagination, a body of mischievous error.

The fundamental article of Burke's creed as a statesman was that the science of Government—which he defines as “a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human *wants*”—was an experimental science, that semi-civilised and civilised mankind had been for long engaged in making, however unwillingly and unwittingly, the experiments necessary to the ascertaining and establishment of its principles, that human history was a record of the successes and failures of these; and that it was the part of practical wisdom to read these aright, and draw from them the guiding light indispensable to the management of State affairs. Experience is the word that strikes the key-note of Burke's political philosophy; to him experience was a judge from whose decision there was no appeal; “the solid test of long experience” was the nearest possible approach to an unerring guide through the intricacies of human affairs vouchsafed to man; he speaks as scornfully of those who “consulted their invention and rejected their experience” in dealing with the American question in 1774, who remained unconvinced when “experience had given judgment,” as of those later objects of his abhorrence, the French regenerators of society on abstract principles, who,

he tells us, had "a certain inward fanatical assurance on all subjects, and who wholly abjured the errors and heresies of experience and observation." Every political system that had grown up in a nation was an embodiment of the experience of countless generations ; the Constitution of the English People, for instance, was an expression of the practical genius of that people, working patiently for more than a thousand years, feeling its way towards a destiny of its own, and in its course not only unfolding certain vital principles, but also taking into its substance such new material as altered circumstances had made necessary to its expansion or continued vigour, and throwing off whatever had become obsolete and harmful.

This Constitution was the tale of the experience of the English nation ; and he who would play the part of State-Reformer in England must be very careful to read it aright. And quite as strong an obligation, he was persuaded, lay on those who would essay the far more difficult task of State-reform in France ; the fact that France had grown great and developed an unconquerable strength under a particular kind of Government he regarded as an unanswerable argument in favour of there being something of special value in its long-tried political system, something in harmony with the national character and adapted to the national wants, something that it would take generations to fittingly replace, which, therefore, in all systems of reform, however searching, it would be of vital importance to preserve. Burke's thoughts

on this momentous question were in substance the same as those of Carlyle, though cast in a different mould, and finding a different, but still energetic, mode of utterance. Like his crabbed successor he looked upon the history of any great nation as a revelation of the principles and laws of action essential to the wise guidance of that nation, its records as the treasury of its hoarded experience, its fundamental institutions as the product of that experience. He would certainly have demurred to some things in Carlyle's language, but would as certainly have found himself in complete accord with such a sentiment as this: "The History of a nation is the Bible of the nation; what part of it they have laid to heart and do practically know for truth, is the available Bible they have." Or as this: "There is no Biography of a man, much less any History or Biography of a nation, but wraps in it a message out of Heaven, addressed to the hearing ear or the not hearing." But for a naked, undiluted expression of the sentiment it would not be easy to beat Bacon's: "The Counsels to which Time is not called, Time will not ratify." It was, therefore, not merely a leading principle with Burke, but an imperative duty, which a statesman could neglect only at a dreadful cost to his nation, to make use of existing materials in all reformatations of the State.

This we may call the rational basis of that deep reverence for antiquity which filled Burke's soul as men's souls are filled with the fervour of a cherished religious belief, which was to him almost the "article

of a standing or falling State.” In words that remind one of the well-known but not always understood French saying, he told his countrymen that he was “obliged, by an infinitely overbalancing weight of authority, to prefer the collected wisdom of ages to the abilities of any two men living”—even if those two were Pitt and Fox. It is the basis of his favourite doctrine of prescription, and of the sacredness of all rights that rested thereon, “which, through long usage, mellows into legality Governments that were violent in their commencement.” It is the basis of the tenderness which he shows for even the faulty parts of the Constitution, which he exhorts us “to improve with zeal, but with fear”; for it was his opinion that “the very defects of a political system may tend to its stability, because they are agreeable to its nature.” It is the basis of his assertion that “the State is a perpetual succession,” and that “the greatest of all evils in a State is a blind and furious spirit of innovation under the name of Reform.” It is the basis of his conviction of the enormous value of prejudices to a people; he held that so far from these being condemnable as clogging the State’s advance towards perfection, they were absolutely essential to that advance, that the well-being and steady growth of a nation depended on the transmission from generation to generation of a good solid stock of inherited prejudices, that a nation which had disencumbered itself of every traditional prejudice, fixing an impassable gulf between its present and its past, would soon find itself in a welter of confusion from which time and dear-bought experience

alone could rescue it. For prejudices, he thought, contain a latent wisdom which was the uniformly-continued sense of mankind, which human sagacity could not be better employed than in discovering; prejudices, rightly considered, were "the general bank and capital of all nations and of ages." It is the basis, too, of his refusal to reprobate any form of Government merely upon abstract principles, of his admission that there are "situations in which the purely democratic form will become necessary, and that there may be some where it would be clearly desirable." And it is the basis of his abhorrence and dread of systems, political mechanisms manufactured by human ingenuity out of materials supplied solely by itself.

From this radical rule of Faith necessarily sprang an aversion to abstract reasonings in politics, to which he gave repeated expression years before the beginning of the Revolution. Throughout his career few things were surer to put him in a passion than the advocacy in Parliament of a policy upon general principles; he never could listen with patience to any argument that was based on *a priori* grounds. He hated the very sound of metaphysical distinctions; he once declared in Parliament that "a resort to abstract ideas of right, to mere general theories of government, was, in the circumstances then present, no better than arrant trifling." He told the sheriffs of Bristol that "one sure symptom of an ill-conducted state was the propensity of the people to resort to theories." Subtle deductions, sweeping

generalisations thrown out like nets in which the most dexterous practical politicians, however nimbly they skipped, might find themselves caught, he brushed contemptuously aside as idle, yet perilous, frivolities that impudently tried to win the notice of men absorbed in the task of shaping the policy of a great nation in the presence of pressing public questions, on which a false step might bring death or ruin to thousands. To the intrusion of philosophers into practical politics he had always a special dislike; and his opinion of metaphysical statesmen—Condorcet, for instance—is conveyed in one terrible sentence, which, let us hope, he wrote in his haste: “Nothing can be conceived more hard than the heart of a thorough-bred metaphysician.”

This attempt to indicate—for it is nothing more—one or two of the essential articles of Burke’s political creed will perhaps be sufficient, in spite of its imperfect expression, to show that Burke’s enmity to the Revolution was no mere caprice, was an inevitable thing, a kind of Fate. His principles were the breath of his intellectual and moral being; no saint or martyr ever lived or died with a firmer persuasion of the saving efficacy of his religious faith, than Burke had of the saving efficacy of his political. The political salvation of a people at any important turning-point of its destiny, depended on the observance of the rules of this faith; should this people, on such an occasion, reject its experience and consult its invention, it could not fail to do incalculable mischief to itself and others. Now this was precisely what France did in its terrible

Revolution ; it put itself unreservedly in the hands of men who denied everything that Burke affirmed, and affirmed everything that Burke denied ; it spurned away from it as a pernicious thing that inheritance from the past which, along with much that was evil and not a little that was vile, contained that experience of ages which, in Burke's eyes, was of such priceless value to them, and never so distinctly priceless as at the dread moment when a thorough purgation of the whole state system had been decided to be necessary ; it tore itself away with one demoniac wrench from its whole past, set all its energies to work, and brought into play all its vigilance, that it might carry into the new order it had planned not even the most paltry detail of the old. In De Tocqueville's words, "The French people submitted themselves to every species of constraint in order to fashion themselves otherwise than their fathers were ; they neglected nothing that could efface their identity." They acted as if their entire history hitherto had been one gigantic blunder and crime without a single redeeming feature that was worth preserving ; they proscribed the most colourless terms that reminded them of their former condition ; for a time it was torture to French ears to hear these.

The Revolution was therefore a process of destruction without example in human history for swiftness and finish ; not one stone was left upon another in the whole fabric of society. As Taine puts it, it was not a revolution, but a *dissolution* ; or, in Burke's more eloquent language, "a decomposition of

the whole civil and political mass for the purpose of originating a civil order out of the first elements of society." It was chaos come again. The men of the Revolution "chose to act as if they had never been moulded into civil society, and had everything to begin anew." Burke did not live when genius, not incorrectly perhaps, gave fine names to this operation, calling it a Phœnix fire-consummation, the death-birth of a world, and other grandeurs of expression ; but if he had, they would not one whit have abated his horror and indignation. He looked upon it as a Medea's cauldron process, or rather as the action of the Chinaman who slays himself in California in the confident assurance that he will instantaneously find himself at his native home in the Flowery Land ; and the men — the miscellany of country lawyers, country doctors, and country magistrates, that formed the third estate in the National Assembly—an impious parricidal band who were leading France straight into "a horrid medley of madness, vice, impiety, and crime." The necessity for great changes he did not deny ; admitted, too, that good would come out of the dreadful evils he saw and the more dreadful he foresaw, but maintained with characteristic vehemence that patience would accomplish more than force, and that the regenerators of France were exacting from their countrymen and themselves the highest possible price, the uttermost farthing, for the benefits gained. He compared these to a man who sets his house on fire because his fingers are frost-bitten—for as yet Elia was not—seems to

think them like Sylla's husbandman, who burned his only toga because it held certain vermin that troubled him. He moreover declared that "men had no right to deal out measureless evils to the present generation that future ones may benefit."

And the men that set France on the pyre, the principles on which they wrought, the new Phoenix that they hoped to cunningly substitute in place of the old, and the character of the phantom Phoenix itself—how Burke's gorge rose when he saw such men and such things intruded into practical politics at such an awful moment, and with such a trust committed to them! Among the first the most active spirits were abstract philosophers, metaphysicians, dreamers, generalisers of maxims of natural law, builders of systems, despisers of antiquity, daring speculators into the origin of society, with as absolute a confidence in their own ability to regenerate France as without experience in affairs, men whom Burke described as "carried with such a headlong rage towards every desperate trial that they would sacrifice the whole human race to the slightest of their experiments," and who certainly soon did strange work, work that converted for a time the sacred city of civilisation into a Coomassie, and France into a land peopled by mere Furies. Upon the pernicious influence of these men the judgment of De Tocqueville is not materially different from Burke's, however different may be the temper in which it is given. The principles on which their action proceeded were of the kind that Burke had always detested, principles

deduced from the myriad speculations of a speculative age—harmless, perhaps stimulating, so long as they remained speculations—from airy abstractions woven out of native material by subtle brains that despised the ancient permanent sense of mankind, had faith only in all-victorious analysis, in individual reason, and had a fatal desire, peculiar, we are told, to the French character, to see their great ideas triumphant in practice.

And as for their Phoenix of a Constitution, with its symmetry, its exquisitely proportioned parts, its graceful lines, its nice adjustments, so beautiful in the world of ideas, so helpless anywhere else, Burke's contempt for it as a thing constructed on a basis of metaphysics, geometry, and arithmetic, without any reference to "anything moral or anything politic, anything that relates to the concerns, the actions, the passions, the interests of men," was unbounded. Yet it was, though the first, the most highly-finished piece of mechanism turned out of the workshop of the indefatigable Constitution-builder of the time, the Abbé Sieyès. Its only defect was that it would not march; and it had to give place to a succession of other Phoenixes, all of exquisite workmanship, and mostly from the same works. The only thing, Burke said, that could give it a chance of success was that its frame-work should also "make a revolution in nature and provide a new constitution for the human mind."

There were many other things in the conduct of the makers of the Revolution that Burke regarded

as mistakes so calamitous as to be crimes ; but no space is left even to enumerate them. The childish impatience that they showed, their seeking to do in a year or two, at most, the work of as many generations—their attempting, in fact, to clear at a single bound the broad space that separated the old from the new age—seemed to him an ominous characteristic. But the master motive of his antagonism would seem to have been dread of the example in England. If the principles and ideas of the Revolution gathered head here, the sacred Constitution itself, in whose eyes, as our poet says, is the wisdom of a thousand years, would not be safe. What the church of St. Mary Redcliffe was to Chatterton, this Constitution was to Burke : an object of passionate reverence. He had gazed upon it so long and so lovingly, had pored over its minutest details with such admiration and sympathy, that it became a part of himself, its spirit got blended with his own. He watched over it, therefore, with jealous care, scented danger to it in every breeze, and flew at anything that approached it with a questionable look with the spirit of a brood-hen. But even on this topic I am not now at liberty to dwell.

Burke's works on this subject abound in faults, in gross and palpable blunders, misconceptions, misrepresentations, injustices, exaggerations ; in an unwarrantable heightening of whatever was redeeming in the men or institutions of the old *régime* ; in an equally unwarrantable heightening of the crimes of the new. Yet a close scrutiny would, I suspect, reduce

not inconsiderably the sum of the sins of this class laid to his charge. If he praises the parts, as well as the good intentions, of Louis XVI., De Tocqueville does the same ; if he brands the French as a "Cannibal Republic," Carlyle solemnly avers that there was a tannery at Meudon for human skins—a statement that is at least a mythical, if not a literal, truth ; if he reprobates the presiding genius of this Republic as "a spirit that evokes the powers of Hell to rectify the disorders of the Earth," Carlyle almost echoes his words,—“Hell, very Hell, bore sway on the Earth for a season.” To enlarge on this topic is, however, also impossible at present.

Even now, after wagon-loads of books have been written on the Revolution, after an army of poets have sung so many lofty hymns, or wrung so many alliterations from the language, in its praise or reprobation, Burke has still, I think, a special right to be heard on the subject. No contemporary gave such decisive proof of exceptional insight into the character of the movement ; and his forecast of its future is astonishing for general correctness and occasional accuracy. Alone among men then living, he had a premonition at the outset that it was no ordinary struggle for freedom, no simple revolt against oppression and wrong of the type familiar to readers of history ; long before what De Tocqueville finely calls "the head of the monster" had become visible to others, its outlines, dim but unmistakable, had revealed themselves to Burke. Five months after the meeting of the States-General he stated his impression.

that the French "would have to pass through many varieties of untried being before the State reached its final form," and spoke of their "progress through chaos and darkness"; four months later, when not a suspicion of coming trouble ruffled the mental calm of other English statesmen, he wrote: "It looks to me as if I were in a great crisis, not of the affairs of France alone, but of all Europe, perhaps of more than Europe. All circumstances taken together, the French Revolution is the most astonishing that has hitherto happened in the world." He was the first to see that it was a European concern, would ere long set the whole of Europe boiling; when Pitt was confident that "the present convulsions of France must terminate in general harmony and regular order," he warned his countrymen that a terrible experience was in store for them. An entire year before the notorious decree of November, 1792, went forth from the Convention, he alleged that it was "the very essence of the plan of the Revolutionary leaders to disturb and distract all other Governments," and predicted for France "an endless succession of restless politicians that would pursue the same course." He thought the pure democracy of 1790 "in a direct train of becoming a mischievous and ignoble oligarchy"; and in a year or two it *was* one. And exactly at the same time, six years before men heard of Napoleon Buonaparte, he wrote these words: "Some popular general, who understands the art of conciliating the soldiery, and who possesses the true spirit of command, shall draw the eyes of all men upon himself. Armies will

obey him on his own personal account. . . . But the moment in which that event will happen, the person who really commands your army is your master.”¹ And in another place he says that this restored monarchy would probably be “the most completely arbitrary power that has ever appeared on earth.”

Two years before the 21st of January, 1793, he recorded his belief that in spite of solemn declarations, oaths, addresses, and protestations, the French would “assassinate the King,” and was at fault in only a single detail, that they would probably “*first* assassinate the Queen.” In 1796, when someone spoke in his presence of the termination of the Revolution, he burst out: “The Revolution over! why, Sir, it is scarcely begun.” He not merely asserted that the war would be a long war, but went near fixing its exact length. And, strangest thing of all, he foretold that the reigning Emperor (Francis II.) would, if he took a particular course, be the last to wear the Imperial Purple. Francis took that course, and he was the last.

A host of other considerations remain, but these must suffice at present. With one thought more I will close my paper, a thought that is full of consolation in its general application, and, on the worst supposition,

¹ More than two years after Burke's death, the revolution of Brumaire happily accomplished, “Sieyès s'écria en présence des principaux auteurs du coup d'état: ‘Messieurs, vous avez un maître! Bonaparte veut tout faire, il sait tout faire, et il peut tout faire.’”—Lanfrey, ii. 1.

indicatory of a place in the universal economy for this part of Burke's work. It seems to me one of Burke's happiest utterances, and to belong to that class of maxims which, as Joubert says, nourish the will. It is this : "Our antagonist is our helper."



